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Forty Years After the Larry P. Decision:
School Psychologists' Perceptions of the Assessment of African American Students with
Specific Learning Disabilities

A Dissertation by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

July 2021

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Forty Years After the Larry P. Decision:
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Specific Learning Disabilities

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ABSTRACT

Forty Years After the Larry P. Decision:

School Psychologists' Perceptions of the Assessment of African American Students with
Specific Learning Disabilities

by Shara L. Cabreros

Purpose: The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify and describe the assessment models school psychologists use to identify African American students with SLDs in three of the K-12 school districts in Riverside County. A second purpose of this study was to determine how school psychologists within three districts of Riverside County perceive the assessment model used in their school district affects the identification of SLDs in African American students. A third purpose of this study was to determine the assessment model school psychologists in three districts in Riverside County believe most accurately identifies SLDs in African American students.

Methodology: The current study used a qualitative approach to examine the perceptions and assessment methods of psychologists when assessing African American students. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data to illustrate the participants subjective experiences. Artifacts and data from interviews were coded using NVIVO software to identify common themes.

Findings: Examination of data indicated a lack of consensus among the participants regarding what methods were used currently to identify African American students with SLD. Respondents indicated that gaps in training, change in thought processes, use of professional judgment, and increased assessment time affect the validity of their

eligibility decisions. A majority of respondents reported that processing strengths and weaknesses (PSW) was their preferred method for assessing African American students.

Conclusions: The study's findings supported a number of conclusions. Psychologists who participated in this study believe that the ban on IQ testing for African American students is discriminatory and creates a barrier in their ability to conduct legally defensible assessments and place students into special education services accurately. Respondents believe that the Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) should provide additional training in the alternative assessment model.

Recommendations: In order to broaden the scope of this study, recommendations for further research were offered. These recommendations include replicating the study to include other geographic areas or areas with a higher percentage of African American students, conducting a qualitative study examining potential bias in the assessment and/or referral process, and conducting a qualitative study with multiple stakeholders.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

For school psychologists, the use of intelligence quotient (IQ) tests as part of an assessment battery in the identification of students with specific learning disabilities (SLD) is viewed as an essential job function. In the state of California, school psychologists are prohibited from administering standardized IQ tests to African American students. In 1979 due to overrepresentation of African American students identified with intellectual disabilities, the *Larry P. v. Riles* ruling effectively banned the use of IQ tests in special education assessment of African American students (Bersoff, 1980). In the *Larry P. v. Riles* decision, Judge Peckham ruled that IQ tests are culturally biased against African American students and that the use of IQ tests resulted in overrepresentation of African American students in classes for the Mentally Retarded. As a result of Judge Peckham's ruling, school psychologists within the state of California had to use alternative assessment methods when assessing students of African American descent. In the 40 years since the ruling barring the use of IQ tests in the assessment of African Americans, students of African American descent continue to be overrepresented within special education and the assessment of African American students in California continues to be an area of uncertainty and controversy. Data collected from 2002 by the U.S. Department of Education identified that in California, 12% of African Americans are identified as disabled compared to 7.4 % of European American students and 3.5% of Asian American students; furthermore, African American students were almost twice as likely to be identified as having learning disabilities or emotional disturbances in California than nationwide (Powers et al., 2014).

Background

Federal Legislation, Students with Disabilities

In the 1940s, only 15% of students with intellectual disabilities who lived with their families received any type of schooling or training (Grossman, 2011). As a response to the segregation of children with disabilities, in the 1970s federal laws were formulated to provide equal access to education for people with disabilities. In 1975, the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act also known as Public Law 94-142 (PL 94-142) provided access to public schools for all students with disabilities. In 1997, PL 94-142 was reenacted and renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA defined a “child with a disability” as a child:

with intellectual disability, hearing impairments (including deafness), speech or language impairments, visual impairments (including blindness), emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, or specific learning disabilities; and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services.

Part B of IDEA required that a comprehensive evaluation of a student’s cognitive, physical, social, emotional and adaptive development be conducted to determine special education eligibility (Hosp & Reschly, 2003). The 13 eligibility categories identified in IDEA (2004) include: autism, blindness, deafness, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, intellectual disability¹, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impaired, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairment. Federal definitions for each of the 13 categories are included in Appendix A.

¹ Previous legislation used the term Mentally Retarded but in October 2010, Congress passed Rosa’s Law, which changed references to “mental retardation” in specified Federal laws to “intellectual disability,” and references to “a mentally retarded individual” to “an individual with an intellectual disability.”

Special Education System

The National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.) reported that approximately 50 million students were enrolled in elementary and secondary public education schools in the fall of 2016. In the 2013-2014 school year, the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Program estimated that 6.5 million children between the ages of 3-22 received special education services through IDEA, Part B, under one of the federally identified disability categories. These 6.5 million students represent about 13% of the total public-school enrollment. The federal percentage distribution of individuals served under IDEA, Part B by disability type is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Percentages of Students Served Under IDEA

Disability Type	Individuals Served in 2013-2014
Specific Learning Disability	35%
Speech Language Impairment	21%
Other Health Impairment	13%
Autism	8%
Intellectual Disability	7%
Developmental Delay	6%
Emotional Disturbance	5%
Multiple Disabilities	2%
Hearing Impairment	1%
Orthopedic Impairment	1%
Deaf-blindness	<0.5%
Traumatic Brain Injury	<0.5%
Visual Impairments	<0.5%

Note. Adapted from *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Database*, by U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, n.d. (<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/state-level-data-files/index.html#bcc>). Copyright 2021 by the author.

Special Education in California

In 1980, all LEAs within the state of California were mandated to form regional consortiums known as Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPA) to provide special

education services needs for students within their boundaries (California Legislative Information. (n.d.a). In California, implementation of IDEA is enforced through the California Master Plan for Special Education, which was first implemented in 1980 with the passage of Senate Bill 1870 (California Legislative Analyst's Office, 1985). SELPAs collaborate with school districts to guide district policy and facilitate programming for special education students.

The SELPA administrator is responsible for ensuring that there is a system for identification, assessment, and placement of students with disabilities throughout California. Compliance with and accountability to state and federal laws are tracked via the California Special Education Management Information System (CASEMIS). The California Department of Education (CDE) hires Coordinated Compliance Reviewers (CCR) to oversee legal compliance (Powers et al., 2014).

Role of the School Psychologist

Social reforms of the late 19th and early 20th century resulted in compulsory schooling in 1918. As a result of compulsory education, children from diverse backgrounds with varying learning abilities resulted in the need for physical and mental examinations in schools (Thomas & Grimes, 1990).

Today, school psychologists are part of a larger school team that is responsible for monitoring student achievement, making recommendations for interventions, and assessing students for special education services (Novencido, 2007). According to Fagan (2014), the history of the school psychologist is very strong in both assessment and intervention functions. Although school psychologists are part of an assessment team, they are often considered specialists in the identification of students with disabilities

because of their training in assessment including the use of intelligence or IQ tests (Novencido, 2007; Reschly, 2000). Castillo et al. (2012) and Reschly (2000) found that school psychologists spend more than half of their time making assessment decisions regarding qualification for special education services. The use of IQ tests in the assessment and identification of students with disabilities is widespread within school systems. In fact, American school psychologists administer 1.5-1.8 million IQ tests each year (Pfeiffer et al., 2000) making school districts the largest consumer of IQ tests in this country. Harry et al. (2002) argued that scores on intelligence tests are the primary factor in eligibility and placement of students in special education. As a result of their training administering and interpreting the results of IQ tests, school psychologists emerged as experts who, by using standardized ability and achievement tests, could differentiate a student's ability to learn and identify which students are in need of specialized instruction (Novencido, 2007).

African Americans and the IQ Test in California

Although use of IQ tests is widespread in schools, the use of IQ tests in the assessment for special education eligibility has also been controversial in part due to overrepresentation of particular racial or cultural groups in special education. As a result of the *Larry P. v. Riles* (1979) case, the use of IQ tests in special education assessment of students of African American descent was banned throughout the State of California. The three arguments central to the *Larry P. v. Riles* case involving overrepresentation of African American students in educable mentally retarded (EMR) classes included: the genetic argument; the socio-economic argument; and the argument that standardized, norm-referenced tests were culturally biased. In this landmark case, Judge Peckham

determined that IQ tests were racially and culturally biased against African American students, resulting in overrepresentation of African American students placed in classes for the EMR (Dizon, 2013).

Because *Larry P. v. Riles* (1979) and subsequent case law rulings resulted in a statewide ban of the use of IQ tests of students of African American descent within California, the number of African American students identified as Intellectual Disability has decreased but African American students continue to overrepresented within special education (Powers et al., 2014). Although the number of African American students identified as intellectually disabled has decreased within the State of California, the number of African American students has increased in other eligibility categories such as SLD and Emotionally Disturbed (ED) (Dizon, 2013). Powers et al. (2014) found that in California, students of African American descent are identified as having SLD at nearly twice the national rate. Dizon (2013) asserted that one of the reasons for the over-identification of African American students is the lack of clarity and consistency in the use of alternative assessment methods.

Although school psychologists must use alternative assessment measures in the assessment of African American students, Dawson and Simmons (2008) reported that over half of the 404 school psychologists in Northern California they interviewed expressed dissatisfaction with alternative assessment methods used for African American students. Collectively, 41-55% felt that they could not obtain the information needed to accurately identify students with special education needs. Seventy-one percent of those school psychologists reported that their school districts did not have standard protocols or guidelines for assessing students of African American descent.

African American SLD Identification Methods

Of the 13 eligibility categories identified in IDEA (1990), students with SLD constitute the largest percentage of students eligible for special education services. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2018) reported that in the 2015-2016 school year, of the 6.7 million public school students who were receiving special education services, 34% were identified as having learning disabilities. In California, students of African American descent are identified as having SLD at twice the rate than the rest of the country (Powers et al., 2014). According to federal law:

A “specific learning disability” means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, speak, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. Such term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. Such term does not include a learning problem that is primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage. (Pub. L. No. 108–446 § 300.8[c]).

SLD Assessment Methods

Discrepancy Model

Prior to the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA, the primary method of identification of students with SLD was the ability/achievement discrepancy model (discrepancy model; McGill et al., 2016). The discrepancy model is based on the concept of unexpected underachievement. In the discrepancy model, the full-scale Intelligence Quotient (IQ) score is used as an estimate of the student’s expected achievement. This score is compared to academic functioning to determine if the student’s academic performance is significantly lower than expected. The primary assumption in the discrepancy model is that the IQ score provides a valid estimate of the student’s capacity to learn, and that

unexpected underachievement is the result of a SLD (Fletcher et al., 2007). IDEA did not provide any specific guidelines to operationalize the *severe discrepancy* necessary to diagnose a SLD; therefore, varying interpretations resulted in differences in students identified (Hosp & Reschly, 2004; Kavale, 2005). Maki et al. (2015) and Haight et al. (2001) argued that cohesion among identification procedures and practices varied across states and even across school districts in the same state. In addition to the inconsistent interpretation of what constitutes a severe discrepancy, critics have pointed to psychometric and conceptual problems inherent with the discrepancy model (Aaron, 1997; Francis et al., 2005; Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). Most importantly to educators, the discrepancy model does not provide useful information to guide instruction and intervention (Salvia et al., 2012). Identification of African American students with SLD using the discrepancy model is even more complex because school psychologists in California must use other measures to estimate a student's cognitive potential. With IDEA's reauthorization in 2004, states were no longer required to use the ability/achievement discrepancy model to identify students with SLD (Christo, 2014). Instead, the federal statues allowed for three methods for identifying students with SLD: (a) ability/achievement discrepancy (discrepancy model), (b) response to intervention (RTI), and (c) an alternative research-based approach that has been interpreted as the pattern of strengths and weaknesses approach (PSW; Nicewicz, 2017).

Response to Intervention (RtI)

The RtI model is based on a prevention model in which all students are provided multi-tiered instruction and intervention based on their current needs (Batsche et al., 2006). RtI models are based on systemic data collection and typically have three tiers,

with each tier providing more intensive intervention and instruction (Burns & Gibbons, 2012). Student data are collected, and students are moved to more intensive instructional tiers if they do not make sufficient progress (Reschly, 2008). Students who do not respond adequately to increasingly intensive interventions are identified as having unexpected underachievement and are identified as having SLD (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003).

Because RtI models link assessment with instructional treatment, Armendariz and Jung (2016) found that both special education teachers and general education teachers preferred the use of RtI over the discrepancy model in identification of students with SLD. Critics of the RtI model point out that the lack of operationalization in defining *lack of response to intervention* may result in variability with which students are identified as having SLD (Maki et al., 2015). Although RtI improves student outcomes and reduces the number of students receiving special education services, critics argue that use of the RtI model does not adequately identify individual processing deficits that are a part of the legal definition and theoretical underpinnings of SLD (Batsche et al., 2006, Kavale & Spaulding, 2008). Mastropieri et al. (2005) argue that without use of additional cognitive assessment, RtI only identifies low achievers but does not differentiate between SLD and other disabilities.

Processing Strengths and Weaknesses (PSW)

The reauthorization of IDEA also allowed states to use “alternative, research-based methods” but provided no other guidelines regarding these alternative approaches (IDEA, 2004). Because the federal definition of SLD includes a disorder of the basic psychological processes and research indicates that students with SLD exhibit cognitive

processing impairments, the third method of SLD identification is examination of intra-individual cognitive strengths and weaknesses, typically referred to as a pattern of strengths and weaknesses (PSW; Hale et al., 2008).

Flanagan et al. (2013) have proposed the dual discrepancy/consistency (DD/C) method of in the identification of students with SLD. They maintain that SLD is different from generalized learning problems in that the student displays generally average cognitive potential and a learning profile that exhibits significant variability that is indicative of processing strengths and weaknesses. The DD/C method includes three criteria in the identification of students with SLD: (a) there is a meaningful relationship and consistency between cognitive and academic weaknesses, (b) the consistency co-occurs with a general ability to think and reason, (c) there are clinically significant discrepancies between cognitive strengths and weaknesses as well as between cognitive strengths and academic weaknesses (Flanagan & Alfonso, 2011). The DD/C approach is based upon the Cattell-Horn-Carroll (CHC) theory of cognitive abilities but also incorporates neuropsychological processing concepts to determine individual needs and targeted interventions more accurately. The seven broad abilities examined in SLD assessment include: crystallized intelligence, fluid reasoning, long-term storage and retrieval, short-term memory, visual processing, auditory processing, and processing speed (Flanagan et al., 2013).

Dehn's (2014) PSW model is grounded in cognitive psychology, education, psychology, and neuroscience, maintaining that learning is based upon cognitive processes. Significant weaknesses or deficits in one or more cognitive processes results in an SLD. Although Dehn argued that it is difficult to identify and assess discrete

cognitive processes, he has identified cognitive processes that he believes possess the strongest relations with academic skills. These cognitive processes include: attention, auditory processing, executive functions, fine motor processing, fluid reasoning, verbal long-term recall, visual-spatial long-term recall, oral language processing, phonological processing, processing speed, visual-spatial processing, verbal working memory, and visual spatial working memory. In Dehn's PSW approach, a diagnosis of SLD is indicated when all the following occur: (a) at least one psychological process is identified as an intra-individual weakness or deficit, (b) the intra-individual weaknesses are statistically significant, (c) there is at least one cognitive processing strength within the average range, (d) the processing weakness has a strong research-based relation with the deficient academic skills, and (e) there should be consistency between process scores.

Statement of the Problem

Although students with SLD represent the largest group of students receiving special education services, there has been little agreement regarding the most accurate method in the consistent identification of students with SLD (Habinsky, 2016; Maki et al., 2015). Kavale et al. (2009) argued that one of the critical issues in the accurate identification of SLD is that the legal definition of what constitutes a learning disability has not changed despite theoretical and empirical advances.

Assessing and identifying of students eligible for special education services remains a primary role of the school psychologist. School psychologists' use of standardized IQ tests in the assessment and identification of students with disabilities is widespread (Pfieffer et al., 2000). Assessment of African American students within California is complex because school psychologists cannot use standardized IQ tests in

the assessment process and must instead use alternative means of assessment (Kavale et al., 2009). Alternative means of assessment vary throughout the state and are typically outlined by the SELPA, but according to Dawson and Simmons (2008), 71% of school psychologists reported that their school district did not have standard protocols or guidelines for assessing African American students. Maki et al. (2015) and Haight et al. (2001) argued that SLD assessment methods vary across school districts, resulting in inaccurate identification of students eligible for special education services. Maki (2018) argued that inaccurate identification of students results in denial of their access to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE), as guaranteed by federal and state law.

Despite the ban on the use of IQ tests within California, students of African American descent continue to be overrepresented in special education. Within California, African American students are identified as having SLDs at a rate twice the national average (Powers et al., 2014).

The lack of clear guidelines within the legal definition results in ambiguity and confusion about how to evaluate students with SLD accurately (Flanagan & Alfonso, 2011). The National Association of School Psychologists (2007) maintains that SLD characteristics are heterogeneous, meaning that there is no single defining academic or cognitive deficit common to all types of learning disabilities, but all SLD students are characterized by neurologically-based deficits in cognitive processes. The three primary assessment methods used to identify students with SLD are discussed next.

Although much research has been conducted regarding the issues in SLD identification, there continue to gaps in knowledge regarding consistent, research-based assessment of students of African American descent by practicing school psychologists

within the State of California as well as their perceptions and training in SLD identification for these students. A further issue is the lack of information about school psychologists' perceptions of whether the current assessment model used in their district is effective in identifying students with SLDs. Additionally, there is a lack of information on which assessment models school psychologists view as the most effective in identifying African Americans with SLDs.

Because there is no unified approach in the educational assessment of African American students, the focus of the current study was to examine what approaches practicing school psychologists in California use to identify SLD in African American students. Secondly, the study aimed to examine perceptions of school psychologists regarding implementation of reliable assessment procedures for African American students and what barriers exist in the assessment and identification of African American students with SLD.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify and describe the assessment models school psychologists use to identify African American students with SLDs in three of the K-12 school districts in Riverside County. A second purpose of this study was to determine how school psychologists within three districts of Riverside County perceive the assessment model used in their school district affects the identification of SLDs in African American students. A third purpose of this study was to determine the assessment model school psychologists in three districts in Riverside County believe most accurately identifies SLDs in African American students.

Research Questions

1. What assessment models do school psychologists in three unified school districts in Riverside County use to identify African American students with specific learning disabilities in their K-12 school district?
2. How do school psychologists in three unified school districts in Riverside County perceive the assessment model used in their district affects the identification of specific learning disabilities in African American students?
3. What do school psychologists in three unified school districts in Riverside County perceive is the assessment model that most accurately identifies specific learning disabilities in K-12 African American students?

Significance of the Problem

Although the role of the school psychologist is evolving, a primary role of school psychologists as members of school teams is provide assessment to identify students who are eligible and in need of special education services (Novencido, 2007). Traditionally, students with SLD were primarily identified using a discrepancy model. With the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004, states were given the opportunity to continue to use a discrepancy model, a RtI model, or the PSW model to identify students with SLD (Dizon, 2013). Although some states have adopted a particular assessment model to identify students with SLD, other states, including California, have not mandated a specific approach. In addition, within California, school psychologists are banned from using IQ tests in the assessment of African American students. Use of varying models and inconsistent criteria in the identification of students with SLD pose legal and ethical concerns because lack of uniformity may result in differential identification of students

with SLDs and overrepresentation of students of African American descent within special education (Dizon, 2013; Maki, 2018). Statistics indicate that despite the ban on the use of IQ tests in assessment procedures, African American students continue to be overrepresented in special education and within California they are identified as having SLDs at twice the national rate (Powers et al, 2014). Because studies have shown that students with SLDs have a more negative self-concept (Zelege, 2004), lower academic achievement (Judge & Watson, 2011) and poorer post-secondary job outcomes (Cortiella, 2009), proper evaluation and identification of students with SLDs are vital in providing effective intervention to improve these outcomes. Use of differential methods of identification of SLDs also poses legal issues related to a student's access to FAPE that is guaranteed by federal law (Maki, 2018).

Burns et al. (2008) argued that there is limited research regarding which of the three methods of identifying students with SLDs is the most valid and reliable. Limited studies have been conducted examining school psychologists' perceptions and knowledge in applying and advocating for use of one of the three current models in the identification of students with SLDs.

This study strove to provide information that can be useful in developing staff training and district policy. Results may also enhance assessment procedures to increase consistency in the identification of African American students with learning disabilities in order to provide specialized interventions to reduce the negative effects associated with learning disabilities.

Definitions

- *Due Process*: Mediation or administrative hearing procedures in case of disputes. (Pub. L. No. 108–446 §300.307).
- *Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)*: Each public school system is responsible for ensuring that each child with disabilities receives a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) at no expense to the parent. (Pub. L. No. 108–446 §300.307).
- *Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)*: Each child is assured of his/her right of education with non-disabled peers in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) to the maximum extent appropriate. (Pub. L. No. 108–446 §300.307).
- *Local educational agency (LEA)*: A public authority that provides legal control or direction to public schools. (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1965)
- *Specific Learning disability (SLD)*: One of 13 disability categories outlined in IDEA/IDEIA under which a student may receive special education services. SLD is believed to be a psychological processing disorder affecting how students process incoming information, consequently affecting student achievement (Fletcher et al., 2007). Under federal law, SLDs may manifest in eight achievement areas: basic reading, reading fluency, reading comprehension, mathematical calculation, mathematical reasoning, written expression, oral expression, and listening comprehension (Pub.L. No. 108–446 § 300.8[c])

- *Ability-achievement discrepancy (Discrepancy model)*: A method used to identify students with learning disabilities that requires a *severe* discrepancy between one's cognitive ability and achievement (Pub. L. No. 108–446 § 300.307) in addition to a psychological processing disorder.
- *Response to Intervention (RtI)*: An SLD identification method that requires a student to demonstrate inadequate response to scientifically based intervention and instructional supports. RtI models are frameworks of tiered service delivery (Multi-Tiered Systems of Support – MTSS) to match instruction and intervention to student need. (Pub. L. No. 108446 § 300.307).
- *Pattern of Strengths and Weaknesses (PSW)*: A third method used to identify individuals with SLD that allows for use of “alternative, research-based methods” (Pub. L. No. 108–446 §300.307).
- *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1990)*: The federal law governing the provision of special education services for students with disabilities.
- *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004)*: The 2004 reauthorization of federal law governing the provision of special education services for students with disabilities.
- *Psychological processing disorder*: Disorders caused by dysfunction in the central nervous system that impede an individual's ability to acquire new knowledge and skills. Learning disabilities are defined as psychological processing disorders (Lyon et al., 2001).

Delimitations

This study utilized stratified purposeful sampling. According to Patton (2002), purposeful sampling results in-depth understanding by studying information-rich cases. The population selected for this study was limited to school psychologists who administered school-based assessments within one of the three districts within Riverside County, California during the 2019-2020 school year.

Organization of the Study

The remainder of the study is organized into four chapters, references, and appendices. Chapter II contains a literature review encompassing the three primary models used to identify students with SLD. Theoretical backgrounds of each approach as well as a review of relevant research are provided. Chapter III details the research design and methodology of the study including the population, sample, and data gathering procedures. Chapter IV includes information about data collection and analysis. Chapter V includes the summary, findings, conclusion, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Background

This chapter includes a brief history of various theories of intelligence, a review of relevant literature related to legal guidelines of assessment under IDEA, the role of school psychologists in the identification of students with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLDs), cultural bias in testing, and an overview of the *Larry P. v. Riles* court ruling. Several models used to identify students with SLDs are outlined as well as an overview of the federal, state, and county statistics regarding students receiving special education services. The chapter concludes with a detailed description of Riverside County Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) alternative assessment matrix used in the assessment of African American students.

History of Intelligence and the Development of IQ Tests

Intelligence is derived from the Latin word *intelligere* which means *to understand* (Dizon, 2013). The first psychology text to use the term intelligence was Herbert Spencer's 1855 *The Principles of Psychology*, which asserted that intelligence was biologically based but evolved through interaction with the environment (Wasserman & Tulsy, 2005). Several theories of intelligence evolved subsequently throughout the 20th century. The concept of what constitutes intelligence continues to be debated (Sattler, 2001).

In 1931, Charles Spearman wrote a seminal paper in which he described a *two factor* theory of intelligence in which *g-factor* (intelligence) was mathematically derived by examining the shared variance across intelligence tests (Wasserman & Tulsy, 2005). Intelligence or *g* is the foundation of overall intelligence (Dizon, 2013). Spearman

(1931) believed that verbal definitions of intelligence would never be adequate; using the construct g would eliminate the need to find an exact definition of intelligence.

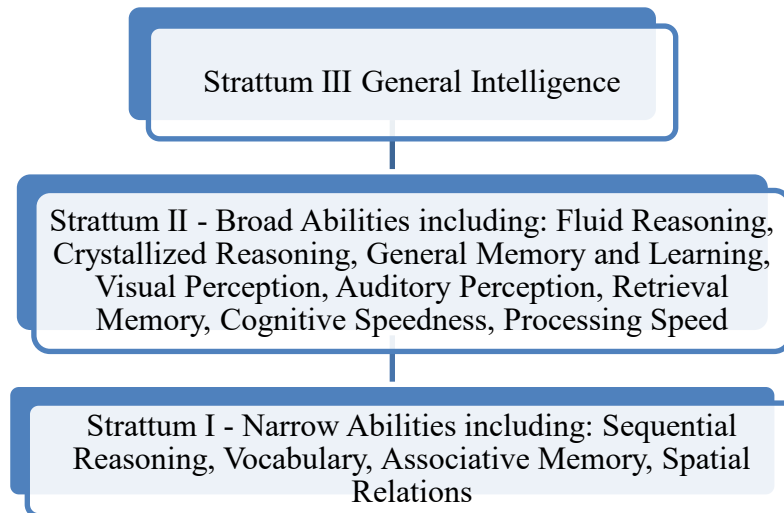
Spearman viewed g as the ability to engage in metacognition and self-reflection, understand how things are related to one another, and generate new ideas from previously learned experiences.

In 1966, Raymond Cattell and John Horn developed a theory that intelligence is based upon two factors: fluid and crystallized abilities. Fluid intelligence requires the use of inductive and deductive reasoning to solve unfamiliar tasks, whereas crystallized intelligence requires the use of vocabulary and general cultural information to solve problems (Sattler, 2001).

In 1993, John Carroll developed a three-stratum theory of intelligence in which he proposed a hierarchical model of cognitive abilities. Carroll's three strata or levels included: specific, broad, and general ability categories. Carroll identified more than 69 specific abilities, described as Stratum I abilities. Eight broad abilities were identified as Stratum II abilities. The eight broad abilities in Stratum II include fluid intelligence (Gf), crystallized intelligence (Gc), general memory and learning (Gy), broad visual perception (Gv), broad auditory perception (Gu), broad retrieval ability (Gr), broad cognitive speediness (Gs), and processing speed (Gt). General abilities or g were identified as Stratum III. Carroll's theory of intelligence is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Carroll's Theory of Intelligence



Adapted from *Human Cognitive Abilities: A Survey of Factor-Analytic Studies*, by J. B. Carroll, 1993, Cambridge University Press. Copyright 1993 by the author.

In the late 1990s McGrew and Flanagan (1998) combined the theories of Cattell-Horn and Carroll to develop the Cattell-Horn-Carroll Theory (CHC) model of intelligence. CHC is a multidimensional view of intelligence that includes three cognitive levels. The general factor is the third level of intelligence. The second level consists of 10 broad cognitive abilities and the first level is made up of more than 70 specialized abilities. Wechsler and Schelini (2006) found evidence supporting the CHC model of intelligence. Indeed, researchers largely consider CHC model to be the most comprehensive and empirically supported theory of cognitive abilities (Kaufman, 2009), in no small part as a result of more than 60 years of factor analysis research and the large amount of empirical support in the current research (Flanagan & Dixon, 2014). The CHC theory is used extensively in research literature as well as the foundation in developing intelligence and neurocognitive assessments (Flanagan et al., 2007, 2012).

The CHC model continues to be extended and revised, new and recently revised tests of intelligence are based extensively on the CHC theory (Wechsler, 2003; Woodcock et al., 2001). The primary difference between the Carrol and Cattell-Horn theories of intelligence is that Carrol's theory included the concept of a global g that represented overarching intelligence ability, whereas Cattell and Horn disagreed with the concept of global g (Flanagan & Dixon, 2014).

History of IQ Testing

Francis Galton, a British scientist and mathematician, is considered to be the founder of psychological testing (Hogan, 2007). From 1884-1890, Galton created and gathered data from intelligence tests for over 9,000 participants. Galton was the second cousin to Charles Darwin and much of his work focused on linking heredity and genius. The eugenics movement tried to prove that intelligence ran in families (Wasserman & Tulskey, 2005).

A second primary contributor in the development of the concept of intelligence was James McKeen Cattell (Dizon, 2013). Cattell worked with Galton to create a battery of 50 tests to assess mental functioning (Hogan, 2007). Cattell coined the term *mental test* and his concepts were later used to develop the Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) and American College Test (ACT; Hogan, 2007).

A third contributor in the development of the concept of intelligence and standardized testing was Alfred Binet (Dizon, 2013). Binet focused on mental activities and would later develop a classification system to identify students who could not be successful in regular school programs and would need special training programs in order to succeed (Kamphaus et al., 2005). In 1905, Binet, along with Theodore Simon,

developed the Binet-Simon Scale which was revised in 1908 and included the term *mental ages* (Hogan, 2007). The Binet-Simon Scale was later developed to become the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale (Dizon, 2013).

The first tests of intelligence were used by the United States Army to classify men according to their mental ability in order to assign positions and eliminate *mentally incompetent* soldiers. Arthur Otis and Lewis Terman created a group-administered version of the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale that was used to eliminate the mentally incompetent, classify men according to their mental ability, and assist in selecting competent men for responsible positions (Hogan, 2007). Nearly two million military personnel were administered the Army Alpha (verbal) and Beta (nonverbal) tests. In 1918, these tests were renamed the Otis Group Intelligence Scale and were made available for general use (Dizon, 2013).

These army tests were later adapted by David Wechsler for use in clinical settings. In 1939, Wechsler published the Wechsler-Bellevue Scale, a compilation of already existing test items into which he introduced a classification system whose levels were based on a range of statistical frequencies falling certain distances from the mean (Kamphaus et al., 2005). In 1949, the Wechsler Scale for Children (WISC) was introduced as a method to assess cognitive functioning in children aged 6-16 (Dizon, 2013). In 1967, the Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence (WPPSI) was introduced to provide an assessment tool for preschool aged children. According to Zhu and Weiss (2005), the Wechsler Scales represent the most widely researched intelligence test. Although many cognitive assessment batteries have been developed, the Wechsler

tests continue to dominate intellectual assessment among school psychologists (Wasserman & Tulsy, 2005).

Specific Learning Disabilities and Enactment of IDEA

Learning disabilities were first discussed in the mid to late 1800s and were based on observations of individuals who appeared to have average or above average intelligence but experienced great difficulty in developing basic academic skills (Flanagan & Alfonso, 2011). With the introduction of standardized IQ tests in the 1920s, Raymond Franzen began to calculate the ratio between IQ and educational quotients as a way to identify students with learning disabilities (Kavale, 2005). In 1932, Marion Monroe suggested that students who performed at less than 80% proficiency on four reading tests were underperforming and should be diagnosed with reading disabilities (Hallahan & Mercer, 2002).

In 1963, Samuel Kirk authored a paper entitled “Learning Disabilities” in which he defined LD as:

a retardation, disorder, or delayed development in one or more of the processes of speech, language, reading, writing, arithmetic, or other school subjects resulting from a psychological handicap caused by a possible cerebral dysfunction and/or emotional or behavioral disturbances. It is not the result of mental retardation, sensory deprivation, or cultural and instructional factors. (as cited in Flanagan & Alfonso, 2011, p. 4)

Kirk’s work to define learning disabilities heavily influenced other organizations such as the Learning Disabilities Association of America and Council for Exceptional Children, which helped shaped the federal statute known as the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Flanagan & Alfonso, 2011).

In 1975, the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act also known as Public Law 94-142 (PL 94-142) provided access to public schools for all

students with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 1975). In 1997, PL 94-142 was reenacted and renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which defined a “child with a disability” as a child:

with intellectual disability, hearing impairments (including deafness), speech or language impairments, visual impairments (including blindness), emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, or specific learning disabilities; and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services.

Part B of IDEA required that a comprehensive evaluation of a student’s cognitive, physical, social, emotional and adaptive development be conducted to determine special education eligibility (Hosp & Reschly, 2003).

According to Flanagan and Alfonso (2011), although definitions of what is a learning disability vary, a majority of definitions identify that a LD is a neurologically-based disorder or a disorder in psychological processing that causes learning problems.

IDEA 2004 defines SLD as:

The term “specific learning disability” means a disorder in one of more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, read, spell, or do mathematical calculations. Such a term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia and developmental aphasia. Such a term does not include a learning problem that is primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disability: of mental retardation; of emotional disturbance; or of environmental, cultural, or environmental disadvantages.

The one common factor underlying the identification of students with SLDs is the concept of *unexpected underachievement* (Flanagan & Alfonso, 2011). Because SLDs are not directly observable, various models are used to accurately identify students with SLDs. Flanagan and Alfonso (2011) indicated that “SLD is fundamentally a dimensional

classification that exists on a continuum and for which there are not nature demarcations of specific categories” (p. 117).

The number of students identified with learning disabilities has tripled since the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975. In 2008, the United States Department of Education estimated that about 4 % or 2.6 million school-aged children were classified as having a SLD. In 2011, students with SLDs represented 43% of all students eligible for special education services (Flanagan & Alfonso, 2011). Data illustrating the percentage of students eligible for special education services under each category under IDEA are provided in Table 2.

Table 2

Students Aged 6-21 Served Under IDEA in 2004

IDEA Disability Category	Percentage of all Disabilities	Percentage of Total School Enrollment
Specific Learning Disability	43.4	3.89
Speech or Language Impairment	19.2	1.72
Other Health Impairments	10.6	0.95
Intellectual Disability	8.3	0.74
Emotional Disabilities	7.4	0.67
Autism	4.3	0.39
Multiple Disabilities	2.2	0.20
Developmental Delay (3-9 years)	1.5	0.13
Hearing Impairments	1.2	0.11
Orthopedic Impairments	1.0	0.09
Visual Impairments	.44	0.04
Traumatic Brain Injury	.40	0.04
Deaf Blindness	.02	0.00

Note. Adapted from *Data Analysis System*, by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, n.d. (<http://nces.ed.gov/das/>). Copyright 2021 by the author.

The federal definition of SLDs also includes exclusionary clauses. Students cannot be identified as having SLDs if their underachievement is the result of sensory or

motor disorders, intellectual disability, emotional/behavioral disorders, or cultural/economic disadvantage (IDEA, 2004).

Hosp and Reschly (2004) defined “classification criteria” as “rules that are applied to determine if individuals are eligible for a particular diagnosis” ((Although the evaluation for SLDs is guided by IDEA 2004 legislation, the use of vague and ambiguous terms in the law leads to issues of reliability and validity in the identification of SLDs (Kavale & Forness, 2000).

The passage of federal regulations in 2006 mandated that states adopt criteria to identify children with SLDs. Federal guidance to states in the development of these criteria included the following:

1. Must not require the use of a severe discrepancy between intellectual ability and achievement;
2. Must permit the use of a process based on a child’s response to scientific, research-based interventions; and
3. May permit the use of other alternative research-based procedures for determining whether a child has an SLD. (IDEA, 2004).

In 1980, California legislature mandated that school districts and county school offices form SELPAs that consist of geographical regions “of sufficient size and scope to meet the needs of all special education students living within that geographic region” (California Legislative Information, n.d.a.). Today there are over 130 SELPAs in the state. Each SELPA has developed a Local Plan that provides oversight and guidance relating to the implementation of IDEA.

California Education Code 56195.5 maintains that each SELPA “shall have authority over the programs it directly maintains, consistent with the local plan submitted” (California Legislative Information, n.d.b.). The SELPA administrators are responsible for ensuring that there is a system for identification, assessment, and

placement of students with disabilities throughout California. Assessments are typically conducted by a multi-disciplinary team at each child's school. The team consists of a site administrator, a general education teacher, a special education teacher, a school psychologist, parent(s), and related service providers (speech pathologists, nurses, occupational therapist) as needed.

Special Education Statistics

Because IDEA does not provide specific strategies to identify students with learning disabilities, methods vary across the country and within states. To understand how many students are identified under IDEA, the National Center for Educational Statistics (n.d.) reported that approximately 50.4 million students were enrolled in elementary and secondary public education schools in the fall of 2016. In the 2016-2017 school year, 6,228,235 students attended elementary and secondary public schools within the state of California (California Department of Education [CDE], n.d.). Of the 6,228,235 public school students enrolled in elementary and secondary schools in California, 428,489 students were enrolled in the 25 school districts within Riverside County. Table 3 presents 2016-17 enrollment data for each district in Riverside County.

Table 3*Riverside County, CA Student Enrollment per District*

	2016-2017 Student Enrollment
Riverside County Office of Education *	8,520
California School for the Deaf-Riverside	352
Alvord Unified *	19,255
Banning Unified *	4,541
Beaumont Unified	9,975
Corona-Norco Unified	53,157
Desert Center Unified *	19
Desert Sands Unified *	28,958
Hemet Unified *	21,710
Jurupa Unified *	19,194
Menifee Union Elementary *	11,676
Moreno Valley Unified	33,408
Nuview Union *	2,972
Palm Springs Unified *	23,087
Palo Verde Unified *	3,096
Perris Elementary *	5,963
Perris Union High *	10,769
Riverside Unified	42,769
Romoland Elementary *	3,832
San Jacinto Unified *	11,220
Coachella Valley Unified *	18,719
Lake Elsinore Unified *	22,019
Temecula Valley Unified	29,917
Murrieta Valley Unified *	22,978
Val Verde Unified *	19,953
RIVERSIDE COUNTY TOTAL	428,489

Note. Districts belonging to the Riverside County SELPA are indicated with an *.

In the 2013-14 school year, the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs estimated that 6.5 million children between the ages of 3-22 received special education services through IDEA, Part B, under one of the federally identified disability categories. These 6.5 million students represent about 13% of the total public-school enrollment. Representing 35% of all disabled students, SLD represents the largest eligibility category under IDEA in 2013. Table 4 illustrates the

distribution of those 13 % of individuals served under IDEA, Part B, by disability type in 2013.

Table 4

Percentage of Individuals Served Under IDEA, Part B in 2013 by Disability Type

Disability Type	Percentage
Specific Learning Disability	35%
Speech Language Impairment	21%
Other Health Impairment	13%
Autism	8%
Intellectual Disability	7%
Developmental Delay	6%
Emotional Disturbance	5%
Multiple Disabilities	2%
Hearing Impairment	1%
Orthopedic Impairment	1%
Deaf-blindness	<0.5%
Traumatic Brain Injury	<0.5%
Visual Impairments	<0.5%

Note. Adapted from *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Database*, by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, n.d. (<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/state-level-data-files/index.html#bcc>) Copyright 2021 by the authors.

Of the 6,228,235 public school students in the California in 2017, 774,665 were identified as students with disabilities under one of the 13 eligibility categories articulated by IDEA. Of the more than six million students with disabilities, the 297,469 students with SLDs were the largest group identified. In Riverside County, 54,075 students were identified as having a disability under IDEA in 2017. The 21,903 students with SLDs represented the largest group of disabled students within Riverside County. Of African American students eligible for special education services, students with SLDs were the largest group, with 1,925 students. Table 5 delineates the number of students qualifying under each eligibility category including their ethnicity.

As indicated previously, a majority of students with disabilities under IDEA are identified as having an SLD. School psychologists have the responsibility for assessing and determining whether or not a student has an SLD designation. The role of school psychologists in the assessment process as well as assessment models used by psychologists to identify the presence of learning disabilities have developed in phases since the early 20th century.

Table 5

Riverside County Special Education Enrollment by Ethnicity and Disability

Ethnicity	Intellectual Disability	Hard of Hearing	Deaf	Speech/ Language Impairment	Visual Impairment	Emotional Disturbance	Orthopedic Impairment	Other Health Impaired	Specific Learning Disability	Deaf-Blindness	Multiple Disability	Autism	Traumatic Brain Injury	
Native American	15	*	0	75	*	*	*	66	191	0	*	54	*	
Asian	100	54	11	481	11	14	25	141	291	0	36	465	*	
Pacific Islander	*	*	*	33	0	*	*	16	55	0	*	22	0	
Multi	55	18	*	428	*	57	17	305	567	0	17	282	*	
Hispanic	2,214	585	85	7,097	130	581	361	3,544	15,322	*	432	3,492	82	
African-American	251	43	*	582	18	178	32	780	1925	0	69	483	*	
White	518	163	25	2593	60	415	150	2293	3558	*	178	1813	28	
Riverside County Total	3,153	863	121	11,289	219	1,245	585	7,145	21,903	<11	732	6,611	110	54,075
State Total	43,855	10,633	3,242	161,485	3,487	24,936	10,453	97,893	297,469	115	7,161	112,318	1,618	774,665

* Denotes values under 11.

Note. Adapted from *Statewide Enrollment in California Public Schools by Ethnic Group, 2011-12*, by the California Department of Education, 2012 (<https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/SpecEd/SEEnrEthDis2.asp?cChoice=SEEthDis2&cYear=2017-18&TheCounty=33,RIVERSIDE&clevel=County&ReptCycle=December>). Copyright 2021 by the author.

History and Role of the School Psychologist

The earliest study related to the training and role of the school psychologist was conducted in 1914 by Wallin, who determined that school psychologists were poorly trained and focused solely on conducting assessments measuring ability and achievement in order to *sort* children into different educational programs. By 1930, the role of the school psychologist had expanded to include intervention and remedial instruction and counseling, but the primary focus of the school psychologist remained assessing and placing students into different educational programs. The role of the school psychologist as psychometrician continued throughout the 1950s, with research indicating that two-thirds of school psychologists' time was spent in testing and assessment (Fagan & Wise, 2007).

In the 1960s and 1970s, the role of the school psychologist evolved to focus on the school psychologist as a *repairer* who provides counseling and consultation to provide intervention to struggling students (Fagan & Wise, 2007). In 1963, Gray identified the school psychologist's role as a

data-oriented problem solver who brings research competencies to bear on the problems in schools...[and as the] transmitter of psychological knowledge and skills who helps to disseminate current research into the applied settings of the schools. (Fagan & Wise, 2007, p. 106)

Because IDEA requires that a comprehensive evaluation be conducted before an eligibility decision can be made, school psychologists have emerged as specialists in the assessment of students with disabilities (Hosp & Reschly, 2003). In large part, school psychology has grown substantially due to the school psychologist's role as the administrator of the IQ tests in identifying students eligible for special education (Farrell, 2010).

According to, Fagan and Wise (2007), the traditional role of the school psychologist includes assessment, intervention, and consultation. Fagan and Wise defined assessment as a “complex problem-solving or information-gathering process” with the goal of “understand[ing] the difficulties a child is experiencing in order to intervene and ultimately help the child” (p. 117). School psychologists use a multi-factored approach to assessment that may include a combination of review of school records, observation, testing, and interviews to gather information about the child’s functioning (Fagan & Wise, 2007). The school psychologist then synthesizes the data with information collected by other team members into a multidisciplinary psychoeducational report that includes important information, recommendations for interventions, and whether a student is eligible for special education services. The multidisciplinary report is then shared with parents and other relevant staff who are responsible for the child’s educational progress.

The second traditional role of the school psychologist involves intervention. Fagan and Wise (2007) indicated that ultimate goal of the assessment is to identify individual intervention strategies. Intervention strategies are discussed at the multidisciplinary meeting and strategies are documented in the child’s individual educational plan (IEP). Before the passage of Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), which required that eligibility decisions be made by a multidisciplinary team, school psychologists often decided single-handedly which students qualified for special education services, so school psychologists continue to hold strong influence in eligibility and placement decisions.

The third traditional role of the school psychologist involves consultation, which Fagan and Wise (2007) described as “a mutual problem-solving process between two or more professionals” (p. 136). In order to provide effective consultation, school psychologists must have a strong knowledge base, good interpersonal skills, and effective communication skills. School psychologists primarily provide mental health consultation, behavioral consultation, crisis consultation, and organizational consultation.

Many forces contribute to the changing role of the school psychologist. The first force is the political pressure with the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, which forced schools to focus on measured outcomes for all children, including those with disabilities. The second force involved the focus on the RtI model that was emphasized in the reauthorization of IDEA legislation. The third force of change comes from school psychologists themselves who felt that the traditional focus on assessment limits their ability to make real changes to improve schools. These forces have contributed to the evolving role of the school psychologist to improve competencies and capacities for all students (Fagan & Wise, 2007).

Although there have been efforts to expand the role of the school psychologist to something beyond the role of the psychometrician, Bramlett et al. (2002) surveyed 370 school psychologists who reported that nearly half (47%) of their time was spent in assessment, compared to 16% of their time spent in consultation, 13% in intervention, 8% in counseling, 7% in conferencing, and 3% in supervision. The results found by Bramlett et al. were similar to those found by Lund et al. (1998), who reported that school psychologists spend more than 50% of their time in assessment related to eligibility for special education programs. Survey findings from 2004, 2006, and 2008 indicated that

testing including administration of IQ tests is the main duty and responsibility of school psychologists (Farrell, 2010).

Although IQ tests are a primary tool used by school psychologists in the identification of students with disabilities, many question the role these tests play and argue that IQ tests contain biases (Reynolds & Suzuki, 2012). Psychoeducational assessments and assessment practices are at the core of many legal battles, including the debate over cultural bias in testing. Cultural bias in testing involves the legal issue of whether psychological testing is fair to all students regardless of race, ethnic background, and gender (Fagan & Wise, 2007).

Cultural Bias in Intelligence Testing

The first U.S. court case involving cultural bias in schools was *Hobson v. Hansen* (1967). In this case a disproportional number of African American students in Washington, DC public schools were placed in lower functioning classes based upon group-administered tests. The primary questions raised in *Hobson v. Hansen* (1967) were whether the group tests accurately reflected a student's innate abilities, and secondly, whether group tests were sufficient to justify placement into low-ability level classes (Fagan & Wise, 2007). In this case, the court ruled that group tests results were not sufficient to be used for placement. Since the *Hobson v. Hansen* (1967) ruling, other cases such as *Diana v. California State Board of Education* (1970), *Guadalupe Organization, Inc. v. Tempe Elementary School District No. 3* (1972), *Larry P. v. Riles* (1984), and *PASE v. Hannon* (1980) have ruled that use of individual intelligence testing has resulted in overrepresentation of minority students in special education classes

(Fagan & Wise, 2007). The *Larry P. v. Riles* (1979) case resulted in legislative action that banned the use of IQ tests within the state of California.

Larry P. v. Riles, 1979

In the 1968-1969 school year, African American students represented 9% of the population in California but 27% of students in the Educable Mentally Retarded (EMR) classrooms. As a result, in 1969, House Resolution 444 was passed, ordering the State Board of Education and State Department of Education to address this disproportionality (*Larry P. v. Riles, 1979*). In 1970, California law required that testing be provided in the student's home language and that only IQ tests from an approved list could be used to place students into EMR classrooms (California State Department of Education, 1992).

Despite the passage of this legislature, minority students continued to be overrepresented in EMR classes in both the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) and the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). In 1972-75, 80% of the students in EMR classes within SFUSD were minority students. In 1973-74, African American students represented 24-25% of the student population but represented 56-59% of students placed in EMR classrooms (*Larry P. v. Riles, 1979*).

In 1971 in the *Larry P. v. Riles* lawsuit, six African American students from the SFUSD filed a complaint arguing that they were wrongfully identified as EMR and placed in special classes. The attorneys for the students argued that the assessment and placement focused too heavily on standardized IQ tests and that IQ tests are biased against African American children (*Larry P. v. Riles, 1979*). During this time period, differences in IQ scores between ethnic groups were established by Robert Thorndike who found that the mean IQ score of African American students was about one standard

deviation less than that of their White counterparts (Dizon, 2013). Although differences in IQ scores used during this time period between races was evident, the reasons for these differences have long been debated (Brown et al., 1999).

On June 20, 1972, the court ruled that the case was a class action and granted a preliminary injunction barring the use of IQ tests. On December 13, 1974, the lawsuit was expanded to all African Americans present and future. The named defendants were the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the State Board of Education, and the Superintendent of SFUSD and the SFUSD Board of Education. The defendants voluntarily stopped using IQ tests for placement in EMR classes for all students in California (*Larry P. v. Riles*, 1979).

On October 16, 1979, Judge Peckham ruled in favor of the plaintiffs and banned the use of all standardized, norm-referenced intelligence tests for EMR placements of African American students. In 1981, Superintendent Wilson Riles appealed the ruling that he intentionally discriminated against African American students by supporting the use of IQ tests. Judge Enright granted Riles appeal and cleared him of “knowingly and intentionally discriminating against African-American students” (*Larry P. v. Riles*, 1979).

Larry P v. Riles (1979) included three arguments to explain the overrepresentation of African American students in EMR classes (Dizon, 2013). The first argument was the *genetic argument* which maintained that the African American gene pool resulted in lower levels of intelligence. The second argument was the *socio-economic argument*, which claimed that IQ tests were biased against socio-economically disadvantaged people, regardless of race (*Larry P. v. Riles*, 1979). Experts in the case testified that poverty resulted in lower IQ scores and that mental retardation was a result of poverty.

The third argument was that standardized IQ tests were *culturally biased*. Experts in the trial pointed out that the Stanford-Binet test, which was revised in the 1960s, was standardized with a sample of all White subjects. When it was revised again in 1972, race was not identified in the norming sample, so it was uncertain if the norming sample contained proportional representation. In 1944, in the WISC manual, David Wechsler wrote:

We have eliminated the colored vs. white factor by admitting at the onset that our norms can't be used for the colored population of the U.S.. Though we have tested a large number of colored persons, our standardization is based upon white subjects only. (*Larry P. v. Riles*, 1979, p. 957)

The first WISC in 1944 was standardized using 2,200 Whites. In the 1970s, the WISC R was re-standardized using 15% non-White subjects. In the *Larry P. v. Riles* (1979) case, the judge ruled that including African Americans in the standardization did not adequately address the issue of culturally biased test items. In fact, the result of the re-standardization resulted in an increase of 2-3 points in favor of White students (*Larry P. v. Riles*, 1979).

As a result of the trial, Judge Peckham concluded that (a) the intelligence of African Americans could manifest in ways an IQ test may not show; (b) it was unclear whether IQ tests could accurately measure the mental ability of African American students; and (c) although the validity of IQ tests has been assumed, such validity had not been established for African American students (*Larry P. v. Riles*, 1979). Judge Peckham also noted that there was not enough evidence to indicate that IQ tests were accurate predictors of school performance for African American students.

As a result of the *Larry P. v. Riles* decision, Judge Peckham directed the California State Department of Education to notify all school districts to prohibit the use

of IQ tests of African American students for any special education purpose (California State Department of Education, Special Education Division, 1989). The Larry P. Task Force was formed to provide guidance about how to eliminate the disproportionality within special education. The Superintendent of Public Instruction in California directed all California school districts to use *alternative means of assessment* in the identification and placement of African American students in special education. The Larry P. Task Force Assessment Committee was to provide guidance to develop the alternative assessment of African American students.

The Larry P. Task Force suggested that: (a) the examiner become familiar with the student's background and culture; (b) the examiner use a consultation-intervention model, (c) districts establish well-defined procedures regarding referrals; (d) examiners request that tests be developed and normed to represent African American students; (e) use alternative means of assessment such as personal history, adaptive behavior, classroom performance, and task analysis to determine a student's learning potential; (f) use professional judgment to determine discrepancy; and (g) have school psychologists collaborate and establish assessment procedures (Dawson & Simmons, 2008). Although the Larry P. Task Force provided some guidance, they did not provide a concrete assessment list, nor did they identify a list of banned tests. Powers et al. (2004) determined that current IQ tests do not show cultural biases among White, African American, or Mexican Americans. However, 16 years after the ban on the use of IQ tests for African American students, there was still an overrepresentation of African American students in special education classes for students with intellectual disabilities (CDE, Special Education Division, 1989). Because statistics indicate that African American

students continue to be overrepresented in special education classes, it is necessary to examine the theoretical assessment models school psychologists use when identifying students with learning disabilities.

Theoretical Models to Identify SLD

School psychologists predominantly use three theoretical models when assessing African American students to determine whether or not they have has an SLD. The three models are the discrepancy model, the RtI model, and the PSW model. Collectively, these three models constitute the theoretical framework for this study.

The Discrepancy Model

In 1965, Samuel Kirk and Barbara Bateman introduced the ability-achievement discrepancy model in which the student's IQ score and academic performance were compared to determine if there was unexpected underachievement (Wong et al., 2008). In the discrepancy model, standardized intelligence of assessment is used to calculate an IQ score. An a priori assumption of the discrepancy model is that the IQ score provides a valid estimate of the student's capacity to learn. The IQ score is then compared to academic functioning; typically, a standard score derived from standardized academic assessments to determine if the student's academic performance is significantly lower than expected. The premise of the discrepancy model is that unexpected underachievement in an academic skill is the result of a learning disability (Fletcher et al., 2007). *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition (DSM-IV*; American Psychiatric Association, 1994) identified that 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. (American Psychiatric Association, 1994, pp. 46-47)

The *DSM-IV* continued to clarify that

A variety of statistical approaches can be used to establish that a discrepancy is significant. Substantially below is usually defined as a discrepancy of more than 2 standard deviations between achievement and IQ. A smaller discrepancy 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. (pp. 46–47)

Until updates to IDEA in 2004 and the *DSM* in 2013, the discrepancy model became the standard protocol for identifying students with SLDs (Dombrowski et al., 2004). Flanagan and Alfonso (2012) identify several problems with the discrepancy model. The biggest criticism is that using the discrepancy model fails to differentiate between SLD and low achievers (Flanagan & Alfonso, 2012). They also point out that the discrepancy model is based on the erroneous assumption that an IQ is predictive of achievement (Flanagan & Alfonso, 2012). They also believe that the discrepancy model is applied inconsistently across districts and states making eligibility decisions arbitrary (Flanagan & Alfonso, 2012). (Ysseldyke (2005) reported that even after conducting a meta-analysis study, there is little empirical support for discrepancy models in identification of students with learning disabilities. Several studies have found a significant overlap between students with high IQ and weak academic skills as well as between students with low IQ and weak academic skills; this overlap results in many low achievers being misclassified as having SLDs (Kavale et al., 1994; Stanovich & Siegel, 1994; Ysseldyke et al., 1982). Willis and Dumont (1998) hypothesized that some

students with SLDs have processing deficits that lower their IQ and achievement scores, which may lead to the perception that these students are low achievers rather than students with SLDs. Fagan and Wise (2007) also suggested that discrepancy could occur for reasons other than a SLD, for example, low motivation, poor instructional match, or emotional difficulties.

Another criticism is that standards are often applied inconsistently across states, district, and schools, rendering SLD diagnoses arbitrary and capricious. The discrepancy model does not include guidelines to operationalize what constituted a significant discrepancy between IQ and academic performance, so varying criteria lead to differential identification of students (Kavale & Forness, 2000). Vaughn et al. (2003) found wide variability in SLD identification within a single district. Gottlieb et al. (1994) and MacMillan et al. (1998) found that low achievers were identified as having SLDs even when a significant discrepancy did not exist.

The discrepancy model results in overrepresentation of racial minorities in special education. Dunn (1968) reported that 60-80% of students in special education were from diverse ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. In addition to overrepresentation of ethnic minorities, Hosp and Reschly (2004) and Finn (1982) found disproportionate representation of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds in special education classrooms. Naglieri and Otero (2017) maintained that children from homes with limited enrichment receive low scores on IQ tests because of unequal opportunities to learn.

The discrepancy model has been described as a *wait to fail* model rather than a model of early intervention and prevention. Developmentally appropriate variability in academic development does not allow for a significant discrepancy to be demonstrated

typically until third or fourth grade (Dombrowski et al., 2004). Vaughn et al. (2003) reported that because achievement testing does not typically begin to rely on more complex information acquired through reading and high order cognitive functioning until after the age of 9, many students will not demonstrate significant discrepancies until then.

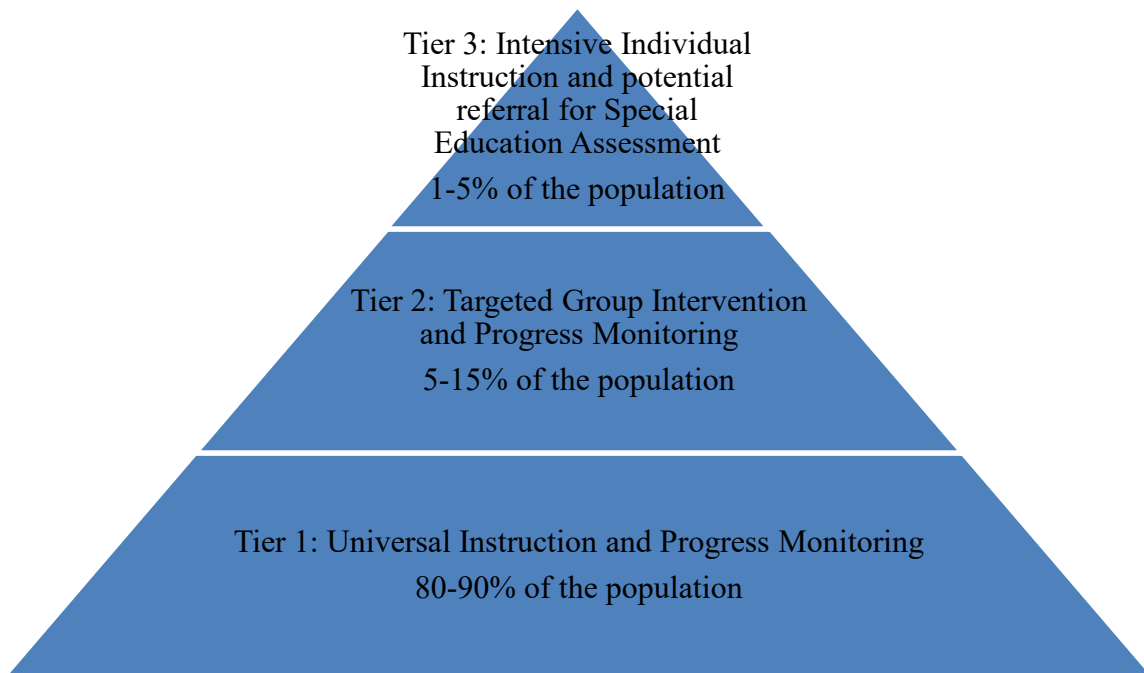
The final problem identified with the discrepancy model that will be discussed in detail is that the model relies heavily on the administration of IQ tests and achievement tests in determining eligibility rather than looking at underlying psychological process deficits that have led to the underachievement. According to Hosp and Reschly (2004), this reliance on standardized test scores places the focus on eligibility and placement rather than instruction and remediation. Reschly (2005) indicated that there is often lack of connection between assessment and intervention. According to Bocian et al. (1999), standardized assessment results generally provide little or no instructional linkage.

Response to Intervention Model

The RtI model was developed as a response to the inconsistency inherent with the discrepancy model and has its theoretical foundation in the medical field's prevention model; i.e., as the level of intervention is increased, the number of individuals will decrease (Ebbinger, 2017). RtI, also referred to as Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), is a three-tiered approach that was designed to facilitate early intervention for students with behavioral and academic difficulties (see Figure 2). RtI uses a multi-tiered approach that uses data to make instructional decisions that provide increasingly intensive interventions to students who do not improve (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009). The primary goal of RtI is to improve academic and behavioral outcomes for all students by offering high-quality instructional for all students.

Figure 2

Response to Intervention Three-Tiered Model of Intervention



Adapted from: Kovelski et al., 2013. Copyright 2021 by the author.

The Tier I foundation of RtI involves high quality instruction for all students in general education paired with universal screening to identify at-risk students (Flanagan & Alfonso, 2011). Universal screening typically occurs at least three times a year to monitor student progress (Kovaleski et al., 2013). In Tier I, students should be exposed to high quality differentiated instruction based on their individual needs (Buffum, 2012; Buffum et al., 2010; Denton, 2012). Typically, 80% of students will respond adequately to Tier I level instruction (Buffum, 2012; Buffum et al., 2010; Denton, 2012; Mellard et al., 2010). Those students who deemed to not be making adequate progress are moved to the more intensive Tier II instruction (Ebbinger, 2017).

About 15% of students will not make adequate progress and will require Tier II intervention (Denton, 2012; Mellard et al., 2010), which is designed to supplement the

general education instruction, not replace it (Mellard et al., 2010). Typically, interventions are implemented in small group interventions lasting for 20-30 minutes for 10-20 weeks (Ebbinger, 2017). When one type of intervention is not effective, the student is identified as a non-responder and additional, more intensive intervention is provided (Flanagan & Alfonso, 2011).

Students who do not make adequate progress in Tier II intervention may be moved up to Tier III intervention groups, which are designed to be research-based, systematic, intensive interventions consisting of three to four students (Buffum, 2012; Buffum et al., 2010). Flanagan and Alfonso (2011) estimated that about 5% of students will require Tier III intervention. Movement among the three levels of intervention is fluid; students can move up and down tiers based upon their progress as monitored by data collection and universal screening (Ebbinger, 2017).

Students may be referred for a special education evaluation at any point in the RtI process (VanDerHeyden & Burns, 2010). A special education evaluation involves conducting a comprehensive psychoeducational evaluation but typically students who repeatedly fail to improve their skills despite increasing intensive instruction are identified as having SLDs by default.

RtI is not considered a single model but a set of processes in which a team identifies the problem, chooses an intervention to address the problem, reviews and evaluates the data, and initiates a new intervention if the problem is still present (Reschly & Tilly, 1999). Fuchs and Deshler (2007) identified three methods used when assessing for instructional response. The first, final status, is to compare norm-references and/or criterion referenced achievement scores to a benchmark score. The second, slope-

discrepancy, is used to compare rates of growth to an average rate using progress-monitoring. The third, dual-discrepancy, compares both rates of growth and level of performance compared to the benchmark.

Flanagan and Alfonso (2011) identified the following strengths in the use of RtI to identify students with SLDs: focuses on more effective instruction, early intervention meets the needs of struggling students, data collection can better inform instruction, helps to ensure the student's poor academic performance is not due to poor instruction, and holds educators accountable for documenting assessment and progress during instructional period. According to VanDerHeyden et al. (2007), districts that adopt RtI models exhibit improved academic and behavioral functioning and decreased numbers of students referred for special education assessment.

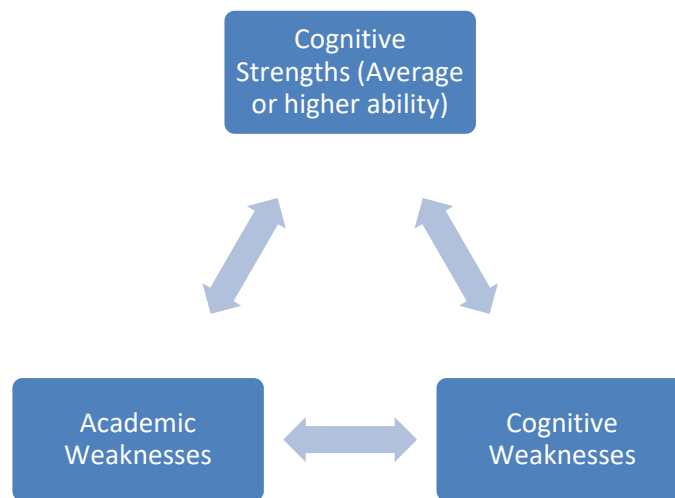
Flanagan and Alfonso (2011) identified the following weaknesses in using RtI to identify students with SLDs: lack of research on best standard treatment protocol, lack of agreement on which instructional methods or measurement tools should be used, lack of agreement on which methods work across grades and academic content areas, different methods of identification of responders versus nonresponders, No consensus on how to ensure treatment integrity, and no indication of a true positive SLD identification. One of the controversies involved with using RtI to identify students with SLD is the issue of identifying which students are making adequate progress (responders) and which students are making inadequate progress (nonresponders). Because the federal government has not provided a concise definition of *inadequate progress* in relation to identification of students with SLD, students may be identified as responders by one evaluation team and nonresponders by a different evaluation team (Kavale & Spaulding, 2008).

Pattern of Strengths and Weaknesses Model

The third method of identification of students with SLD allowed in the 2006 federal law involved the use of *other alternative research-based procedures*, which has been referred to as the pattern of strengths and weaknesses (PSW) model. The PSW model maintains that SLD is defined by a specific pattern of strengths and weaknesses rather than generalized cognitive problems (Compton et al., 2012). The common components of the PSW approach as identified by Flanagan et al. (2010) and Hale et al. (2008) are provided in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Pattern of Strengths and Weaknesses Model



Adapted from: Flanagan, Fiorello, and Ortiz (2010); Hale, Flanagan, and Naglieri (2008)

In the PSW model, the box at the top represents generally average or better cognitive functioning. The two bottom boxes identify academic and cognitive weaknesses. The expectation is that there will be consistency between the academic and cognitive weaknesses. In this model, children with SLDs are identified when they display an unexpected underachievement in their academic functioning.

Fagan (2000) and Suzuki and Valencia (1997) argued that because the PSW approach incorporates processing tests that do not rely on language, they are more appropriate in the assessment of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Critics of the PSW model in the identification of SLDs point out that cognitive patterns show poor discriminant power, which leads to a low rate of false positives but also a moderate or low rate of true positives (Giofrè et al., 2017).

Riverside County SELPA Alternative Assessment

With SLD being the most commonly identified disability among students, the manner in which students are identified was examined within the Riverside County SELPA. Currently, the Riverside County SELPA identifies the discrepancy model, PSW (alternative assessment), and RtI as methods used in the identification of students with SLDs (Riverside County Special Education Local Plan Area [SELPA], n.d.b). Because the discrepancy model requires an IQ score be obtained, the Riverside County SELPA published an *alternative means* assessment guidelines for identifying disabilities in students of African American who cannot be given a standardized IQ test (Riverside County SELPA, n.d.a).

The Riverside County SELPA recommended that the IEP team use prescribed procedures in the identification of African American students with learning disabilities. The SELPA first acknowledges that a severe point discrepancy cannot be identified with African Americans due to the ban on IQ tests. They then instruct that the IEP team must use alternative means that include the use of multiple methods and measures for every domain and academic skill area. The SELPA further instructed that the IEP team must use alternative assessment to identify a severe discrepancy in academic skill that exists as

a result of a disorder in one or more basic psychological processes (Riverside County SELPA, n.d.a).

Riverside County SELPA adopted the MATRIX model as the alternative assessment model to be used in the assessment of African American students. The SELPA maintained that the MATRIX model provided “an organized, systematic, yet flexible system for gathering necessary information and represents best practice for all students” (Riverside County SELPA Alternative Assessment Guide, p. 2). The MATRIX model uses data collection, observations, review of records, interviews, informal assessment, and formal testing to gather data about a student’s functioning among five constructs: reasoning, executive functioning, visual spatial, social cognition, and language.

The first construct, reasoning, is defined as an “active process of solving a novel problem or situation” (Riverside County SELPA Alternative Assessment Guide p. 3). It involves inductive and deductive reasoning as well as intuition and problem solving that does not require much language. The second construct, executive functioning (EF), entails the set of processes used to organize, manage, and regulate oneself to achieve a goal. EF includes planning, initiation or starting a task, ability to control impulses, ability to handle emotions/setbacks, organization, working memory, self-monitoring, cognitive flexibility, and sustained attention over time. EF can be evaluated through informal measures such as observations, interviews, and review of work, as well as more formal measures such as rating scales. Visual-spatial skills involve how visual spatial information is perceived, processed, and utilized. These skills include: the ability to identify components and key features of visual imagery, analyzing

similarities/differences, sequential memory, and recognizing and analyzing patterns as well as storage, retrieval, and application of visual information. Social cognition is the ability to process social information, including the ability to identify and match feelings, perspective taking, and modifying behavior to yield positive outcomes. Social cognition also includes the ability to resolve disputes without verbal or physical aggression and understanding the social consequences of one's words and acts. The final domain is language, which includes verbal and nonverbal ways to share thoughts, knowledge, needs, and feelings with others. Language includes both expressive and receptive vocabulary as well as the ability to process auditory information and retrieve vocabulary rapidly. Language also includes phonology, sound discrimination, and auditory memory span.

The alternative assessment guidelines provide a worksheet to summarize assessment results in order to analyze data to identify the presence of a learning or intellectual disability (Riverside County SELPA, n.d.a). A student's strengths and weaknesses within the five constructs are analyzed to see whether the student's processing strengths and weaknesses are linked to his/her academic strengths and weaknesses. The MATRIX model uses a COMPARES chart that provides information about the strength of the research link between the processing area and an academic achievement area (for the full COMPARES chart, see Riverside County SELPA, n.d.a).

Synthesis Matrix

The literature review in Chapter II was organized by using a synthesis matrix, which provides a structure to identify patterns and themes in qualitative research (Patton, 2002). Patterns and themes identified in this research study included: theoretical

constructs of intelligence testing, IDEA legislation, cultural bias in testing, the role of the school psychologist in assessment, the *Larry P. v. Riles* court decision, and models in the identification of learning disabilities. A synthesis matrix for this study can be reviewed in Appendix B.

Summary

The assessment and identification of students with SLDs is a complex process that involves theoretical constructs, legal guidelines, and professional competencies. Chapter II presented a background in intelligence theory and a wide range of literature related to the assessment and identification of students with learning disabilities. Legislation related to the identification of students with learning disabilities and pertinent legal cases discussing cultural bias in assessment and identification of African American students was also provided.

Although there are over 100 years of research debating theories of intelligence and how to measure intelligence, it continues to be an evolving topic (Flanagan & Dixon, 2014; McGrew & Flanagan, 1998). Extensive research has been conducted examining cultural bias in testing and whether it results in an over-representation of African American students identified for special education services (Fagan & Wise, 2007; Reynolds & Suzuki, 2012). Ongoing research and disagreement persist regarding which of the three primary methods used to identify students with learning disabilities is most reliable (Flanagan & Alfonso, 2011; Flanagan & Dixon, 2014). Although there has been extensive research regarding the pros and cons of the three primary models used to identify students with SLDs, there is less research examining the perceptions and practices of school psychologist in the identification of African American students with

SLDs (Flanagan & Alfonso, 2011, Flanagan & Dixon, 2014; Kavale & Forness, 2000).

This study strove to provide needed qualitative data to identify common themes related to perceptions of school psychologists within Riverside County in their assessment and identification of learning disabilities among African American students. Chapter III provided the methodology by which the perceptions and practice of school psychologists in the assessment of African American students were examined.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Chapter III presents the methodology and procedural components used in this study. Methodology includes a restatement of the purpose of the study and research questions as well as research design, descriptions of the population and sample, development of the interview protocol, data collection procedures, and limitations of the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The problem statement and purpose statement are restated and the reasoning for choosing qualitative methodology is described. This discussion provides a detailed description of the research design including development of interview questions and field testing, data collection procedures, and data analysis.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify and describe the assessment models school psychologists use to identify African American students with SLDs in three of the K-12 school districts in Riverside County. A second purpose of this study was to determine how school psychologists within three districts of Riverside County perceive the assessment model used in their school district affects the identification of SLDs in African American students. A third purpose of this study was to determine the assessment model school psychologists in three districts in Riverside County believe most accurately identifies SLDs in African American students.

Research Questions

1. What assessment models do school psychologists in three unified school districts in Riverside County use to identify African American students with specific learning disabilities in their K-12 school district?

2. How do school psychologists in three unified school districts in Riverside County perceive the assessment model used in their district affects the identification of specific learning disabilities in African American students?
3. What do school psychologists in three unified school districts in Riverside County perceive is the assessment model that most accurately identifies specific learning disabilities in K-12 African American students?

Research Design

The current study used a qualitative design to gather descriptive data to answer research questions examining school psychologists' perceptions and current methods used in the assessment of African American students. Qualitative research uses an inductive approach to collect data to form trends or themes based on words rather than statistical numbers (Patton, 2002). Qualitative research typically uses purposeful sampling of individuals rather than a random sample. Patten (2012) identifies a benefit of purposeful sampling of subjects is that subjects are selected because they are "information rich" (p. 40) and offer useful insight about a particular phenomenon. This study used a phenomenological, holistic approach by examining individual perceptions about a situation (Patten, 2012). Patton (2002) asserted that a holistic perspective examines the whole phenomenon and focuses on "complex interdependences and system dynamics that cannot meaningfully be reduced to a few discrete variables and linear, cause and effect relationships" (p. 41).

This study used a qualitative approach known as generic qualitative inquiry, which Caelli et al. (2003) defined as research that "is not guided by an explicit or established set of philosophic assumptions in the form of one of the known [or more

established] qualitative methodologies” (p. 4). Kahlke (2014) reported that generic qualitative research is flexible and can use the strengths of a variety of methodologies rather than adhering strictly to one methodology. Generic qualitative research is similar to phenomenology in that it seeks to understand how people make meaning from their world and experiences. Lim (2011) indicated that generic qualitative research approach is highly inductive. The use of open codes and thematic analysis results in data that provides a rich description of the particular phenomenon. The purpose statement and research questions of this study guided the choice of generic qualitative inquiry as a means to examine the perceptions of school psychologists in the assessment of African American students. In generic qualitative research, the researcher typically collects data by using semi-structured interviews and begins performing analysis while data is still being collected (Neergaard et al., 2009). Caelli et al. (2003) identified two types of generic qualitative research. The first type is interpretive description, which examines patterns and subjective experiences of a phenomenon (Kahlke, 2014). The second type of generic qualitative research is qualitative description, in which the researcher collects descriptive data of events (Neergaard et al., 2009).

This study focused on generic qualitative interpretive description to examine the perceptions of school psychologists. The use of a generic qualitative approach provided rich data to examine the subject experience of the participants. Data were analyzed using codes, including in vivo codes, while data was still being collected.

For the purpose of this qualitative study, three phases of data collection were implemented. Based upon data collected in 2017, at the time of the study, there were 210 school psychologists employed in Riverside County Special Education Local Plan Area

(SELPA) and 49 of them were employed in the three unified school districts within the geographic area known as the Coachella Valley. The three districts used in this study were Coachella Valley Unified, Desert Sands Unified, and Palm Springs Unified. These districts were chosen for the study because they were all within the Riverside County SELPA, were geographically in close proximity to one another, and had similar demographics but had their own district management and vision statements. This study utilized interviews of 12 school psychologists in order to gather qualitative data examining their perceptions regarding identifying SLDs in African American students. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using NVIVO software to identify common themes.

Population

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined a population as “a group of elements or cases whether individuals, objects, or events that conform to specific criteria and the results are generalized” (p. 129). Because school psychologists are directly responsible for the assessment and identification of students with SLDs, their perceptions of the process were thought to provide meaningful data to answer the research questions.

Charvat (2008) estimated that in 2008 there were 35,400 credentialed school psychologists in the United States with approximately 29,400 primarily employed in public schools. The California Department of Education (CDE) Educational Demographics Office estimated that during the 2017-2018 school year there were 6,159 school psychologists working in California. Of the 6,159 school psychologists in the state of California, approximately 335 school psychologists were employed in one of the 35 school districts within Riverside County. Two hundred ten school psychologists were

employed within the Riverside County SELPA and 49 worked in the three unified districts within the Coachella Valley (Coachella Valley Unified, Desert Sands Unified, and Palm Springs Unified). Riverside County is located approximately 90 miles east of Los Angeles. The number of school psychologists per district within Riverside County is provided in Table 7.

Table 7

Riverside County Pupil Services Staff, Psychologists 2017-18

Riverside County Districts	Number of Psychologists
Alvord Unified *	20
Banning Unified *	3
Beaumont Unified *	7
California School for the Deaf-Riverside *	4
Coachella Valley Unified *	13
Corona-Norco Unified	36
Desert Sands Unified *	19
Hemet Unified *	15
Jurupa Unified *	16
Lake Elsinore Unified *	22
Menifee Union Elementary *	9
Moreno Valley Unified	23
Murrieta Valley Unified *	18
Nuview Union *	1
Palm Springs Unified *	17
Palo Verde Unified *	3
Perris Elementary *	7
Perris Union High *	5
Riverside County Office of Education *	5
Riverside Unified	38
Romoland Elementary *	3
San Jacinto Unified *	8
Temecula Valley Unified	31
Val Verde Unified *	15
Riverside County TOTAL:	338

*Indicates a member of the Riverside County SELPA.

Retrieved from: <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/PS2.asp?cYear=2017-18&aCode=0202,0216&aType=Psychologist&TheCo=33>

All school districts and county offices of education in California are members of geographical consortiums called SELPAs that are of sufficient size and scope to provide

special education services within their boundaries. There are currently 122 SELPAs within the state of California. There are five SELPAs in Riverside County that provide guidance, jurisdiction, and support over Local Education Agencies (LEAs). These four SELPAs include: Corona-Norco SELPA (Corona-Norco Unified School District), Moreno Valley SELPA (Moreno Valley Unified School District), Riverside County SELPA, Riverside Unified SELPA (Riverside Unified School District), and Temecula Valley SELPA (Temecula Valley Unified School District). School psychologists are employed within each district in the SELPA with their primary responsibility being the assessment and identification of students with disabilities. School psychologists receive guidance from their SELPAs to help them identify students for special education services.

Target Population

The target population refers to a subset of the larger population (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). The target population for the study was school psychologists from three unified school districts within the Coachella Valley region of Riverside County. The Coachella Valley is a region in Eastern Riverside County that is 45 miles in length extending from the Cities of Palm Springs to Thermal. The total population of the Coachella Valley in 2019 was 550,000 (Eisenhower Health, 2019). The Valley is served by three unified districts: Coachella Valley Unified, Desert Sands Unified, and Palm Springs Unified. Their combined student population in 2018 was 69,314, representing 16% of the K-12 student population in Riverside County (Education Data Partnership, n.d.). The combined African American student enrollment was 1,872, representing 7% of

the African American enrollment in the county. The districts all serve students from urban, rural, and suburban populations.

Choosing the Coachella Valley within the Riverside County SELPA allowed the researcher to gather information from varied three LEAs within Riverside County that operate under a single SELPA jurisdiction. The districts in the Riverside County SELPA all follow similar directives and procedures, including the assessment and identification of African American students with SLDs. At the time of this study, the researcher was employed by the Palm Springs Unified School District as a school psychologist, offering geographic proximity that allowed convenient access to other school psychologists in the Coachella region. Therefore, the target population for the study was the 49 school psychologists employed by the three districts within the Coachella Valley in the Riverside County SELPA (Coachella Valley Unified, Desert Sands Unified, and Palm Springs Unified). An email request for this study was sent to the special education directors and/or assistant superintendents of the three unified school districts in the Coachella Valley. A copy of the email requesting permission to contact school psychologists within their districts is included in Appendix C. The researcher was given access to the email addresses of the 49 school psychologist's that were employed in one of the three school districts in the 2019-2020 school year.

Sample

McMillian and Schumacher (2010) refer to a sample as “a group of individuals from whom data are collected” (p. 129). According to Green and Thorogood (2009), in most qualitative studies, researchers find little new information after interviewing approximately 20 people. This study's sample size was also influenced by saturation.

Patten (2012) stated that sample saturation occurs at the point in data collection when additional participants do not yield any additional themes or provide any new information. Saturation often occurs after 12-25 interviews have been conducted. The researcher determined that the sample size for the study was 12 school psychologists in the Coachella Valley in Riverside County SELPA. This sample represents more than 10% of the study population.

The email addresses of school psychologists working in the three Coachella Valley area districts of Coachella Valley Unified, Desert Sands Unified, and Palm Springs Unified School Districts (within the Riverside County SELPA) during the 2019-2020 school year were assigned a random number between 1-50. A research randomizer program was used to choose a random sample of the 12 participants. The researcher sent prospective participants an email describing the study and recruiting participants. A copy of the email is provided in Appendix D. The email outlined goals of the study, the voluntary nature of the study, and their right to withdraw at any time. A copy of the Informed Written Consent (Appendix E) and Brandman University's Research Participant's Bill of Rights (Appendix F) was sent to participants who indicated interest in participating in the study. Participants were told that only aggregate data would be reported and that all results would remain anonymous. They were also informed that they could request results if they desired. The participants were asked to sign the informed consent and send a scan or picture of the signed form back to the researcher. If the participant was unable to print out the informed consent form to sign but wanted to participate in the study, their verbal confirmation was solicited during the recorded Zoom meeting. Once the forms were returned, the researcher emailed the 12 participants to

schedule a Zoom meeting for the interview. If a participant indicated that they did not want to participate or did not respond to the initial email, the research randomizer was used to select another participant until 12 individuals were interviewed.

Instrumentation

According to Patton (2002), qualitative research uses interviews to gather data because interviews solicit data that includes feelings, thoughts, and intentions that are not readily observable and can provide information about behaviors that took place in a previous point in time. Interviews also provide insight into another person's perspective. Qualitative research is founded in the principal that other people's perspectives are meaningful. The purpose statement and research questions of this study guided the use of qualitative research methods in order to examine the participants' perceptions and experiences.

This study used semi-structured interviews to elicit data about school psychologists' perceptions of the assessment of African American students with SLDs. Twelve school psychologists who were employed within one of the three Unified School Districts (Coachella Valley Unified, Desert Sands Unified, and Palm Springs Unified) within Riverside County, California were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. The only criterion was that they were employed as school psychologists in Coachella Valley Unified, Desert Sands Unified, or Palm Springs Unified during the 2019-2020 school year. Patten (2012) defined a semi-structured interview as "one in which the interviewer does not need to ask only the predetermined questions" (p. 153). In a semi-structured interview, questions can be reworded to provide greater understanding or additional questions can be added to explore unexpected, unusual, or especially relevant

information. According to Patten, another advantage of a semi-structured interview is that they can be examined carefully at a later date as well as by other researchers.

Research questions were developed based upon the literature review. The researcher developed 12 questions to gather demographic data and their perceptions related to assessment, and identification of African American students with SLD. The first five questions were demographic questions designed to give context to the study. Patten (2012) suggested that researchers collect demographic information to further describe the sample which can help the audience “see” the participants (p. 149). The other seven questions were designed to yield data regarding participants’ perceptions of SLD assessment of African American students. The researcher used the synthesis matrix from the literature review to guide the development of the interview questions to ensure alignment with the study’s theoretical framework and the research questions. An alignment table was created to show the connection among the research questions, the interview questions, and the literature (see Appendix H). The questions were further reviewed by the dissertation committee chair and a Ph.D.-level special education administrator with more than 20 years of experience as a school psychologist and 8 years of experience in administration of special education programs to ensure accuracy of content and alignment with the research questions.

Participants were interviewed individually via Zoom meeting during a mutually agreed upon time between May 2020 and June 2020. Permission to record the interview sessions and the Research Participant’s Bill of Rights were included in the informed consent (see Appendices E & F). Zoom communications use 256-bit TLS encryption and all shared content is encrypted using AES-256 encryption. Chat can be encrypted for

HIPAA-compliant settings (Zoom, n.d.). By recording interviews, the researcher was able to re-examine the original information at a later date and recheck it to ensure the quality of the written transcripts created for the study. For all interviews, the researcher asked each interview question in the same order but was able to ask participants to elaborate on some questions as needed for further clarification. Participants were given the option of taking a break as needed or reminded that they could stop the interview and discontinue participation at any time without repercussions.

Reliability/Validity

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) define measurement validity as “the extent to which inferences made on the basis of numerical scores are appropriate, meaningful, and useful” (p. 173). The initial questions on the interview were developed based on the literature review presented in Chapter II and the synthesis matrix presented in Appendix B. Questions were then field tested by interviewing two school psychologists who were employed outside of Riverside County, and therefore not involved in the study. After the pilot interviews, the participants were asked questions using the Field Test Participant Feedback Questions form (see Appendix I) as a structured way to provide feedback to the researcher regarding the format or in order to revise the questions to improve clarity of the interview protocol. The Field Test Participant Feedback questions form was adapted from an example provided by Brandman University dissertation chair. Additionally, one of the interviews was reviewed by a second observer who holds an Ed.D. credential, has sat on two dissertation committees, and has conducted qualitative research previously. This second observer also provided feedback to the researcher using the Field Participant Feedback Questions provided in Appendix I. Suggestions and feedback were solicited to

improve, change, or delete questions. Appendix H contains an interview alignment table that connects interview questions with research questions. After the field test, it was determined that the interview questions adequately addressed the research questions, and no other changes were made. The Interview Protocol is attached in Appendix J. During the data analysis, the 12 interviews were coded into NVIVO by the researcher. Two interview transcripts were also reviewed by an Ed.D. colleague who has conducted qualitative research previously. Use of intercoder reliability improves the validity in qualitative research (Patten, 2012).

Data Collection

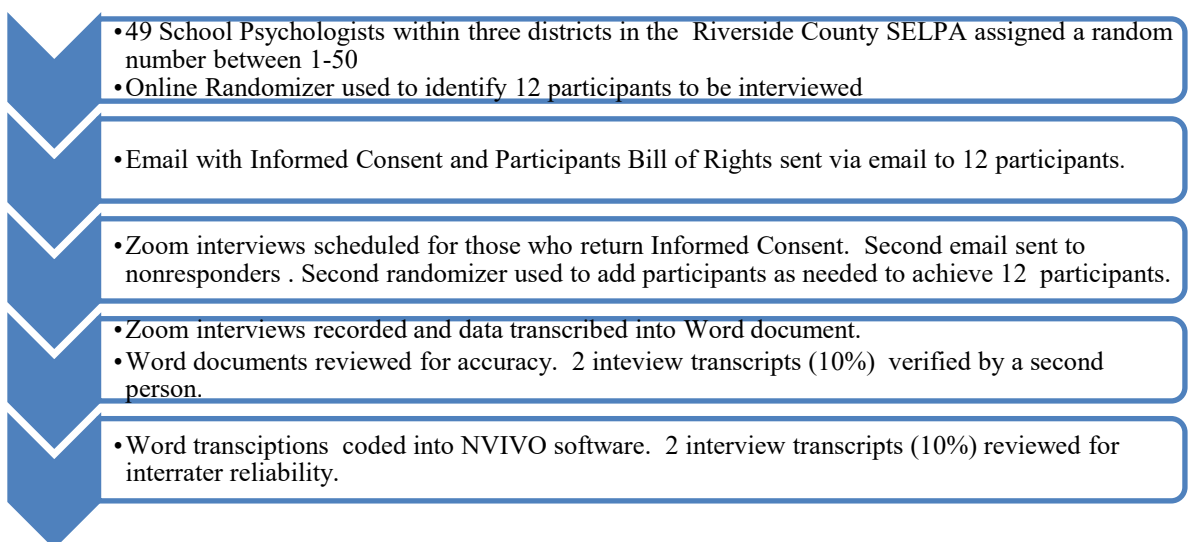
In order to gain approval for this qualitative study, a detailed explanation of research methodology was presented to Brandman University's Quality Review (QR) and Institutional Review Board (IRB) in May 2020. The Brandman IRB and QR were provided with a detailed explanation about how this study addressed ethical issues including: informed consent, protection from harm, and confidentiality of the study. As part of this process, the Brandman IRB and QR were also given the opportunity to review interview questions. A request for expedited review was made to the IRB committee due the fact that there was minimal risk to the participants (psychologically, physically, and socially) and all interviews were brief. The researcher did not begin to collect data until after approval from Brandman University IRB. The IRB approval form is included in Appendix G. Receipt of the IRB approval email was sent to the researcher (see Appendix G).

The data collection process is shown in Figure 4. After IRB approval was received, 49 school psychologists currently employed within the three districts within the

Coachella Valley (Coachella Valley Unified, Desert Sands Unified, and Palm Springs Unified) were identified through an email search. All potential participants were assigned a random number between 1-50. Twelve participants were chosen using a research randomizer and sent an email soliciting participation. A copy of the email sent to potential participants is included in Appendix D. Before the start of each interview, participants were emailed a copy of the Informed Written Consent (Appendix E) and the Participant's Bill of Rights (Appendix F). Participants were asked to sign the written consent and return a picture or scan of the signed informed consent before their interviews were scheduled. Written informed consent forms and the Participant's Bill of Rights are included in Appendices E and F. Interviews were arranged via phone or email and were conducted during a 4-week time frame. If a participant was unable to be interviewed during the 4-week time frame or did not return the signed written informed consent form, another participant was chosen using the randomizer until 12 interviews were conducted.

Figure 4

Data Collection Process



An interview protocol was developed and is shown in Appendix J. All of the interviews were conducted using the Zoom meeting system (<http://zoom.us>). At the start of each interview, the researcher acknowledged receipt of the written consent, provided a brief overview of the participant's rights, and asked for verbal confirmation that the interview could be recorded. Patten (2012) defined an interview protocol as a set of written directions for conducting the interview as well as a standard set of predetermined questions to be asked of all participants. Zoom meetings were recorded, and the audio transcript was saved under the participant's assigned number in a password protected file on a laptop only accessible to the researcher. Data will be stored for 3 years, and then deleted permanently. Zoom meetings lasted for 30-45 minutes. A total of 12 interview questions were asked of each participant. The descriptive data from the 12 respondents provided data about the current methods used in the assessment for African American students and perceptions of the efficacy of the accurate identification of African American students with SLDs. In addition to the interviews conducted nine artifacts were chosen to gather data to improve the validity of the study. Artifacts were chosen through a review of literature.

Data Analysis

After the interview phase, Zoom audio transcript files were reviewed for accuracy and downloaded into a Microsoft Word document. Transcripts were stored in a password-protected laptop only accessible to the researcher. Microsoft Word documents were compared to the Zoom recordings to ensure accuracy of transcription. In addition, 10% of the Microsoft Word documents were reviewed for accuracy by an independent person with no specific training in special education services. When there was a disparity

between the Zoom recording and the transcript, both the researcher and the independent observer reviewed the recorded Zoom meeting and the transcript until they reached consensus. Patten (2012) suggested that having another independent person compare audio-recordings with the transcription “helps ensure the quality of the data collected” (p. 157). Patten indicated that checking a sample of the transcription for accuracy is sufficient to ensure that the entire transcript is accurate.

The interview sessions were transcribed into a Microsoft Word document and transcripts of interviews were imported into NVIVO 10 software for analysis. NVIVO is computer software used to classify qualitative data for analysis. Interview analysis was grouped based upon the research questions. Transcripts were coded by the researcher to identify common themes for each research question. An Ed.D. colleague who was familiar with NVIVO software reviewed 10% of the interview transcripts (two interviews) to provide for intercoder reliability for themes identified. Intercoder reliability refers to the extent to which two (or more) independent coders agree. Intercoder reliability increases the validity of data collected in qualitative research (Patten, 2012). Research Question 1 had 100% agreement between raters. Themes and subthemes identified in Research Question 2 had 75% (6 out of 8) agreement between raters. Themes and subthemes identified in Research Question 3 had 85% agreement (6 out of 7).

Limitations

The limitations of this study included the following:

1. Purposeful sampling was used for this study, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other populations (Patten, 2012). The researcher cannot say

with confidence that the sample is representative of the population of practicing school psychologists within Riverside County, California or throughout the United States.

2. Because of the interpretative nature of qualitative research, the researcher, who is a current school psychologist in Riverside County, California, may have introduced bias into the analysis of the data. Patton (2012) indicated that a researcher should engage in self-disclosure when conducting interviews in order to maintain an unbiased atmosphere.

Summary

Chapter III began with restating the purpose statement and research questions. The chapter presented the methodology and procedural components used in this qualitative research study. This study used a generic qualitative inquiry approach to explore perceptions of school psychologists within Riverside County regarding their training and practice in the assessment of African American students as a result of the Larry P. v. Riles ruling. The study used purposeful sampling to gather qualitative data via interviews of 12 volunteers. Participants are employed as school psychologists within the Riverside County SELPA located in Riverside County, California. Individual interviews were conducted via Zoom Pro and were recorded digitally. Recordings were transcribed into Microsoft Word and transcription data was entered into NVIVO 10 software to identify themes to answer research questions about school psychologists' training and current practice in the assessment of African American students. The generalizability of the study is limited due to the selection bias and small sample size. Selection bias occurred through the use of volunteers and the small number of

respondents in a small geographic area. In Chapter IV, qualitative results and themes of the interviews are identified to gain insight into the perceptions of school psychologists regarding the identification of African American students with SLDs.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION AND FINDINGS

This chapter begins with a review of the purpose statement, research questions, research methods, and data collection procedures. The population and sample are presented along with demographic information. The findings that emerged from the study are also detailed in Chapter IV. The chapter concludes with a summary of the study findings.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify and describe the assessment models school psychologists use to identify African American students with SLDs in three of the K-12 school districts in Riverside County. A second purpose of this study was to determine how school psychologists within three districts of Riverside County perceive the assessment model used in their school district affects the identification of SLDs in African American students. A third purpose of this study was to determine the assessment model school psychologists in three districts in Riverside County believe most accurately identifies SLDs in African American students.

Research Questions

1. What assessment models do school psychologists in three unified school districts in Riverside County use to identify African American students with specific learning disabilities in their K-12 school district?
2. How do school psychologists in three unified school districts in Riverside County perceive the assessment model used in their district affects the identification of specific learning disabilities in African American students?

3. What do school psychologists in three unified school districts in Riverside County perceive is the assessment model that most accurately identifies specific learning disabilities in K-12 African American students?

Research Design

This study used a qualitative design to gather descriptive data to answer research questions in this study examining school psychologists' perceptions and current methods used in the assessment of African American students. Qualitative research uses an inductive approach to collect data to form trends or themes based on words rather than statistics (Patton, 2002). This study used a phenomenological, holistic approach by examining individual perceptions about a situation (Patten, 2012).

This study used a qualitative approach known as generic qualitative inquiry. Caelli et al. (2003) defined generic qualitative inquiry as research that "is not guided by an explicit or established set of philosophical assumptions in the form of one of the known [or more established] qualitative methodologies" (p. 4). According to Kahlke (2014), generic qualitative research is flexible and can use the strengths of a variety of methodologies rather than adhering strictly to one methodology. Generic qualitative research is similar to phenomenology in that it seeks to understand how people make meaning from their world and their experiences. Lim (2011) indicated that generic qualitative research approach is highly inductive. The use of open codes and thematic analysis results in data that provides a rich description of the particular phenomenon. The purpose statement and research questions of this study guided the choice of generic qualitative inquiry to examine the perceptions of school psychologists regarding the assessment of African American students.

This study focused on generic qualitative interpretive description to examine the perceptions of school psychologists. The use of a generic qualitative approach provided rich data to examine the participants' experiences. Data was analyzed by dividing it themes.

In this qualitative study, three phases of data collection were implemented. Based on data collected in 2017, at the time of the study there were 210 school psychologists employed in Riverside County SELPA and 49 of them were employed within the three unified school districts within the geographic area known as the Coachella Valley. The three districts used in this study were Coachella Valley Unified, Desert Sands Unified, and Palm Springs Unified. These districts were chosen for the study because they were all within the Riverside County SELPA, were geographically near one another, and had similar demographics but had their own district management and vision statements. This study utilized interviews of 12 school psychologists to gather qualitative data examining their perceptions when identifying SLDs in African American students. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using NVIVO software to identify common themes.

Population

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined a population as “a group of elements or cases whether individuals, objects, or events that conform to specific criteria and the results are generalized” (p. 129). Because school psychologists are responsible for the assessment and identification of students with SLDs, their perceptions of the process provided relevant data to answer the research questions. Charvat (2008) estimated that in 2008, there were 35,400 credentialed school psychologists in the United States with approximately 29,400 primarily employed in public schools. The CDE Educational

Demographics Office estimated that during the 2017-2018 school year there were 6159 school psychologists working in California.

All school districts and county offices of education in California are members of geographical consortiums called SELPAs that are of sufficient size and scope to provide special education services within their boundaries. There are currently 122 SELPAs within the state of California. Five SELPAs in Riverside County, California provide guidance, jurisdiction, and support over LEAs: Corona-Norco SELPA (Corona-Norco Unified School District), Moreno Valley SELPA (Moreno Valley Unified School District), Riverside County SELPA, Riverside Unified SELPA (Riverside Unified School District), and Temecula Valley SELPA (Temecula Valley Unified School District). School psychologists are employed within each district in the SELPA, holding primary responsibility for the assessment and identification of students with disabilities. School psychologists receive guidance from their SELPA to help them identify students for special education services.

Of the 6,159 school psychologists in the state of California, approximately 335 school psychologists were employed in one of the 24 school districts within Riverside County. The Riverside County SELPA is composed of 20 LEAs spread throughout Riverside County. A total of 210 school psychologists are employed within the Riverside County SELPA. School psychologists in the Riverside County SELPA were identified as the population for this study.

Target Population

The target population refers to a subset of the larger population (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). The target population for the study was school psychologists from

three unified school districts within the Coachella Valley region of Riverside County. The Coachella Valley is a region in Eastern Riverside County that is 45 miles in length extending from the Cities of Palm Springs to Thermal. The total population of the Coachella Valley in 2019 was 550,000 (Eisenhower Health, 2019). The Valley is served by three unified districts: Coachella Valley Unified, Desert Sands Unified, and Palm Springs Unified. Their combined student population in 2018 was 69,314, representing 16% of the K-12 student population in Riverside County (Education Data Partnership, n.d.). The combined African American student enrollment was 1,872, representing 7% of the African American enrollment in the county. The districts all serve students from urban, rural, and suburban populations.

Choosing the Coachella Valley within the Riverside County SELPA allowed the researcher to gather information from varied three LEAs within Riverside County that operate under a single SELPA jurisdiction. The districts in the Riverside County SELPA all follow similar directives and procedures, including the assessment and identification of African American students with SLDs. At the time of this study, the researcher was employed by the Palm Springs Unified School District as a school psychologist, offering geographic proximity that allowed convenient access to other school psychologists in the Coachella region. Therefore, the target population for the study was the 49 school psychologists employed by the three districts within the Coachella Valley in the Riverside County SELPA (Coachella Valley Unified, Desert Sands Unified, and Palm Springs Unified).

Sample

Purposeful and convenience sampling were used to gather information about the perceptions of school psychologists working in one of the three unified school districts in the Coachella Valley. Gentles et al. (2015) defined sampling in qualitative research as the selection of specific data sources from which data are collected to address the research objectives. Patton (2002) defined purposeful sampling as a way of identifying and selecting individuals who are especially knowledgeable about a phenomenon to gather information-rich cases efficiently. The sample was accessible both geographically and via Zoom interview. In 2017, 49 school psychologists were employed within the Coachella Valley geographic area of the Riverside County SELPA. The sample size was also influenced by saturation. According to Patten (2012), sample saturation occurs at the point in the data collection when additional participants do not yield any additional themes or provide any new information. Saturation often occurs after 12-25 interviews have been conducted. The researcher determined that the sample size for the study was 12 school psychologists in the Coachella Valley in Riverside County SELPA. This sample represented more than 10% of the population.

The email addresses of school psychologists working in the three Coachella Valley area districts of Coachella Valley Unified, Desert Sands Unified, and Palm Springs Unified School Districts (within the Riverside County SELPA) during the 2019-2020 school year were assigned a random number between 1-50. A research randomizer program was used to choose a random sample of the 12 participants. The researcher sent prospective participants an email describing the study and recruiting participants. A copy of the email is provided in Appendix E. The email outlined goals of the study, the

voluntary nature of the study, and their right to withdraw at any time. The Research Participant's Bill of Rights was also included in the email. Participants were told that only aggregate data would be reported and that all results would remain anonymous. They were also informed that they could request results if they desired. The participants were asked to sign the informed consent and send a scan or picture of the signed form back to the researcher. If the participant was unable to print out the informed consent form to sign but wanted to participate in the study, their verbal confirmation was solicited during the recorded Zoom meeting. Once the forms were returned, the researcher emailed the 12 participants to schedule a Zoom meeting for the interview. If a participant indicated that they did not want to participate or did not respond to the initial email, the research randomizer was used to select another participant until 12 individuals were interviewed.

Instrumentation

According to Patton (2002), qualitative research uses interviews to gather data because interviews gather data that includes feelings, thoughts, and intentions that are not readily observable, and interviews can provide data about behaviors that take place in a previous point in time. Interviews provide insight into another person's perspective. Qualitative research is founded on the principle that other people's perspectives are meaningful. The purpose statement and research questions of this study guided the use of qualitative research methods to examine the participants' perceptions and experiences.

This study used semi-structured interviews to elicit data about school psychologists' perceptions of the assessment of African American students with SLDs. A sample of 12 school psychologists who were employed within one of the three

unified school districts (Coachella Valley Unified, Desert Sands Unified, and Palm Springs Unified) within Riverside County, California was interviewed using semi-structured interviews. The only criterion was that they were employed as a school psychologist in Coachella Valley Unified, Desert Sands Unified, or Palm Springs Unified during the 2019-2020 school year. Patten (2012) defined a semi-structured interview as “one in which the interviewer does not need to ask only the predetermined questions” (p. 153). In a semi-structured interview, questions can be reworded to provide greater understanding or additional questions can be added to explore unexpected, unusual, or especially relevant information.

Research questions were developed based upon the literature review. The researcher developed 12 questions to gather demographic data and their perceptions related to assessment, and identification of African American students with SLD. The first five questions were demographic questions designed to give context to the study. Patten (2012) suggested that researchers collect demographic information to further describe the sample which can help the audience “see” the participants (p. 149). The other seven questions were designed to yield data regarding participants’ perceptions of SLD assessment of African American students. The researcher used the synthesis matrix from the literature review to guide the development of the interview questions to ensure alignment with the study’s theoretical framework and the research questions. An alignment table was created to show the connection among the research questions, the interview questions, and the literature (see Appendix H). The questions were further reviewed by the dissertation committee chair and a Ph.D.-level special education administrator with more than 20 years of experience as a school psychologist and 8 years

of experience in administration of special education programs to ensure accuracy of content and alignment with the research questions.

Participants were interviewed individually via Zoom meeting during a mutually agreed upon time between May 2020 and June 2020. Permission to record the interview sessions and the Research Participant's Bill of Rights were included in the informed consent (see Appendices F & G). Zoom communications use 256-bit TLS encryption and all shared content is encrypted using AES-256 encryption. Chat can be encrypted for HIPAA-compliant settings (Zoom, n.d.). By recording interviews, the researcher was able to re-examine the original information at a later date and recheck it to ensure the quality of the written transcripts created for the study. For all interviews, the researcher asked each interview question in the same order but was able to ask participants to elaborate on some questions as needed for further clarification. Participants were given the option of taking a break as needed or reminded that they could stop the interview and discontinue participation at any time without repercussions.

Reliability/Validity

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) define measurement validity as “the extent to which inferences made on the basis of numerical scores are appropriate, meaningful, and useful” (p. 173). The initial questions on the interview were developed based on the literature review presented in Chapter II and the synthesis matrix presented in Appendix C. Questions were then field tested by interviewing two school psychologists who were employed outside of Riverside County, and therefore not involved in the study. After the pilot interviews, the participants were asked questions using the Field Test Participant Feedback Questions form (see Appendix I) as a structured way to provide feedback to the

researcher regarding the format or in order to revise the questions to improve clarity of the interview protocol. The Field Test Participant Feedback questions form was adapted from an example provided by Brandman University dissertation chair. Additionally, one of the interviews was reviewed by a second observer who holds an Ed.D. credential, has sat on two dissertation committees, and has conducted qualitative research previously. This second observer also provided feedback to the researcher using the Field Participant Feedback Questions provided in Appendix I. Suggestions and feedback were solicited to improve, change, or delete questions. Appendix H contains an interview alignment table that connects interview questions with research questions. After the field test, it was determined that the interview questions adequately addressed the research questions, and no other changes were made. The Interview Protocol is attached in Appendix J. During the data analysis, the 12 interviews were coded into NVIVO by the researcher. Two interviews were also coded by an Ed.D. colleague who has conducted qualitative research previously. Use of intercoder reliability improves the validity in qualitative research (Patten, 2012). Artifacts were also collected to provide triangulation of data.

Data Collection

To gain approval for this qualitative study, a description of the research methodology was presented to Brandman University's QR and IRB in June 2020. The Brandman IRB and QR were provided with a detailed explanation of how this study addressed ethical issues including: informed consent, protection from harm, and confidentiality of the study. As part of this process, the Brandman IRB and QR were also given the opportunity to review the interview questions. A request for expedited review was made to the IRB committee due the fact that there was minimal risk to the

participants (psychologically, physically, and socially) and all interviews were brief. The researcher did not begin to collect data until after approval from Brandman University IRB. The IRB approval email is included in Appendix G.

After IRB approval was obtained, 49 school psychologists employed within the three districts within the Coachella Valley (Coachella Valley Unified, Desert Sands Unified, and Palm Springs Unified) during the 2019-2020 school year were identified through an email search. All potential participants were assigned a random number between 1-50. Twelve participants were chosen using a research randomizer and sent an email soliciting participation. A copy of the email sent to potential participants is included in Appendix D. Before the start of each interview, participants were emailed a copy of the Participant's Bill of Rights and a copy of the informed written consent form as shown in Appendices E and F. Participants were asked to sign the written consent and return a picture or scan of the signed informed consent before interviews were scheduled. Interviews were arranged via email exchange. If a participant was unable to be interviewed or did not return the signed written informed consent, another participant was chosen by the randomizer until 12 interviews were conducted. An interview protocol was developed and is shown in Appendix J. All interviews were conducted using the Zoom meeting system. At the start of each interview, the researcher acknowledged receipt of the written consent, provided a brief overview of the participant's rights, and asked for verbal confirmation that the interview could be recorded. Patten (2012) defined an interview protocol as a set of written directions for conducting the interview as well as a standard set of predetermined questions to be asked of all participants. Zoom meetings were recorded, and the audio transcript was saved under the participant's assigned number in a

password protected file on a laptop only accessible to the researcher. Data will be stored for 3 years, and then deleted permanently. Zoom meetings lasted for 20-45 minutes. A total of 12 interview questions were asked of each participant. The descriptive data from the 12 respondents provided data about the current methods used in the assessment of African American students and their perceptions of the process of identifying African American students with SLDs.

In addition to interview data, artifacts were collected from SELPA and district websites as well as position statements from the CASP website. The nine artifacts were downloaded and coded in to NVIVO to provide triangulation of data. Artifacts included: the *Larry P. v. Riles* (1979) court decision, the CDE legal advisory (Sandoval, 1997), *Crawford v. Honig* (1992), the CDE *Larry P.* memo (1997), the California Association of School Psychologists' SLD-PSW position paper (Christo, 2014), the California Association of School Psychologists' position statement regarding testing of African Americans (Hiramoto & Gamble, 2017), the California Association of School Psychologists' (2017) letter to the CDE, the Riverside County SELPA alternative assessment guidelines, and the Riverside County SELPA guide in assessing African Americans for special education.

Demographic Characteristics

Thirteen school psychologists agreed to participate in the study. One participant agreed to participate in the interview but then decided to withdraw from the study before the interview. In total 12 school psychologists were interviewed for this study. Table 8 contains demographic information about study respondents. Nine of the respondents were female and three were male. Two respondents were African American, three were

Latinx, and seven were Caucasian. Three respondents held Ph.D. credentials and nine held a master’s degree in school psychology, educational psychology or clinical psychology. All held the California Pupil Personnel Services Credential. Their years of experience ranged from 2-30 years with a mean of 14.625 years.

Table 8

Participant Demographics

	Gender	Highest Degree	State of Training	Years of Experience
Psychologist #1	Female	Ph.D.	Outside of CA	30 years
Psychologist #2	Female	Masters	CA	6 years
Psychologist #3	Male	Masters	CA	17 years
Psychologist #4	Female	Masters	CA	16.5 years
Psychologist #5	Male	Ph.D.	Outside CA	21 years
Psychologist #6	Female	Masters	CA	2 years
Psychologist #7	Female	Masters	CA	10 years
Psychologist #8 (Discontinued participation)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Psychologist #9	Female	Masters	CA	6 years
Psychologist #10	Female	Masters	CA	28 years
Psychologist #11	Female	Masters	CA	2 years
Psychologist #12	Male	Ph.D.	CA	30 years
Psychologist #13	Female	Masters	Outside CA	7 years

All respondents reported that the number of students assessed in the 2019-2020 school year was reduced due to COVID 19 restrictions and school closures. Table 9 illustrates that the average numbers of assessments completed ranged from 28 to 86 with a mean average of 50.66667. Psychologist 5 had the lowest number of completed assessments but did not work the entire 2019-2020 school year as a psychologist within the district. The number of African American students evaluated in the 2019-2020 school year ranged from 0 to 10 with a mean average of 3.583. The percentage of African

American students tested in the 2019-2020 school year represented 7% of the total number of students assessed (Table 9).

Table 9

Number of Assessments

	Number of Assessments completed 2019-2020 *	Number of Assessments of African American Students 2019-2020
Psychologist #1	86	3
Psychologist #2	58	1
Psychologist #3	70	2
Psychologist #4	70	0
Psychologist #5	28*	2
Psychologist #6	29	4
Psychologist #7	35	10
Psychologist #8 (Discontinued participation)	N/A	N/A
Psychologist #9	47	5
Psychologist #10	30	5
Psychologist #11	35	3
Psychologist #12	40	3
Psychologist #13	80	5

*Note: *All participants said the number of completed assessments was reduced due to COVID 19 closures. Psychologist 5 did not work for the entire 2019-2020 school year.*

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Semi-structured interviews and artifact collection were used in his qualitative research study to examine school psychologists’ perceptions of assessment methods they use when assessing African American students for SLDs. Collected data was then coded into themes that were aligned to the research questions in this study.

Data by Research Question

The following section provides a detailed analysis of the qualitative data collected about the perceptions of 12 school psychologists regarding the assessment models used to identify African American students with SLDs. Data collected was organized by each of

the research questions in the study and themes that emerged from the analysis of the interviews were ordered according to the frequency of responses.

Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with 12 school psychologists. Nine artifacts were also reviewed to validate interview data. For each research question, data was coded into themes using NVIVO software. A code is “a short word or phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldana, 2011, p. 3).

Interviews were transcribed into Microsoft Word and downloaded into NVIVO software, after which themes were developed. NVIVO coding for research question 2 resulted in four themes and 167 frequencies. Themes were identified when referenced by a minimum of five respondents (41%). For research question 3, 21 data files (12 interviews and nine artifacts) were coded in NVIVO software and themes were developed. Themes were identified when referenced in 11 data files (52%).

The following section provides a detailed analysis of the data gathered when conducting interviews about school psychologists’ perceptions of the assessment of African American students with SLDs. Data is organized first by research question then by frequency of reference.

Research Question 1

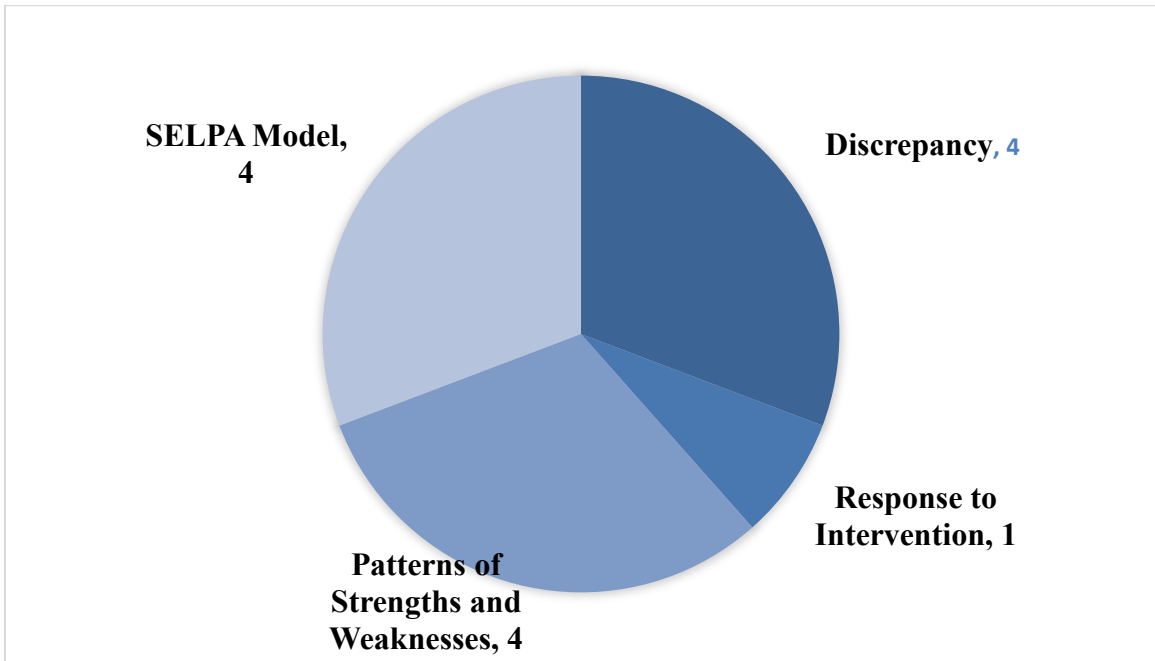
What assessment models do school psychologists in three unified school districts in Riverside County use to identify African American students with specific learning disabilities in their K-12 school district?

The 12 psychologists who were interviewed offered varied responses to this question. Within some districts, participants gave a range of different responses, suggesting some ambiguity in their approach to assessing African American students with SLDs. When asked what assessment model is used to identify SLD in African American students, Psychologist #10 responded, “Well isn’t that a loaded question. You know I feel that we’re not consistent across the district.” Psychologist #12 also responded, “It should be an easy answer, shouldn’t it? But everyone interprets the SELPA approach differently.” Psychologist #5 responded, “We really don’t have a great model to identify students with learning disabilities and that’s only magnified with kids with African American backgrounds.”

An illustration of responses by the 12 school psychologists is provided in Figure 5. A slim majority indicated they used elements of the PSW model. Three psychologists responded that their district uses the discrepancy model to identify African American students with SLDs. One psychologist responded that elements of both discrepancy and RtI are used to identify African American students with SLDs. Four respondents indicated that their district uses a PSW model. Four psychologists reported that their district follows the guidelines established in the Riverside County SELPAs’ handbook; three of those four respondents responded that the SELPA model is theoretically based in the PSW model. There was a lack of consistency among the participants as to which of the four models was used to assess African American students in their district.

Figure 5

Models Used to Identify African American Students with SLDs



Note. Number of responses, $n = 12$. One responded identified using elements of both discrepancy and RtI.

Research Question 2

How do school psychologists in three unified school districts in Riverside County perceive the assessment model used in their district affects the identification of specific learning disabilities in African American students?

All 12 psychologists identified that the model chosen for their current assessment of African American students was influenced by the *Larry P.* decision and resulting CDE guidelines. Analysis of the interviews yielded three themes about their perceptions of their current practice: validity of eligibility decisions, discrimination, and identified barriers to the assessment process. Table 9 presents the themes and frequencies identified by school psychologists in their perceptions of assessing African American students. Figure 6 provides a visual representation of how frequently the themes were identified.

Table 10

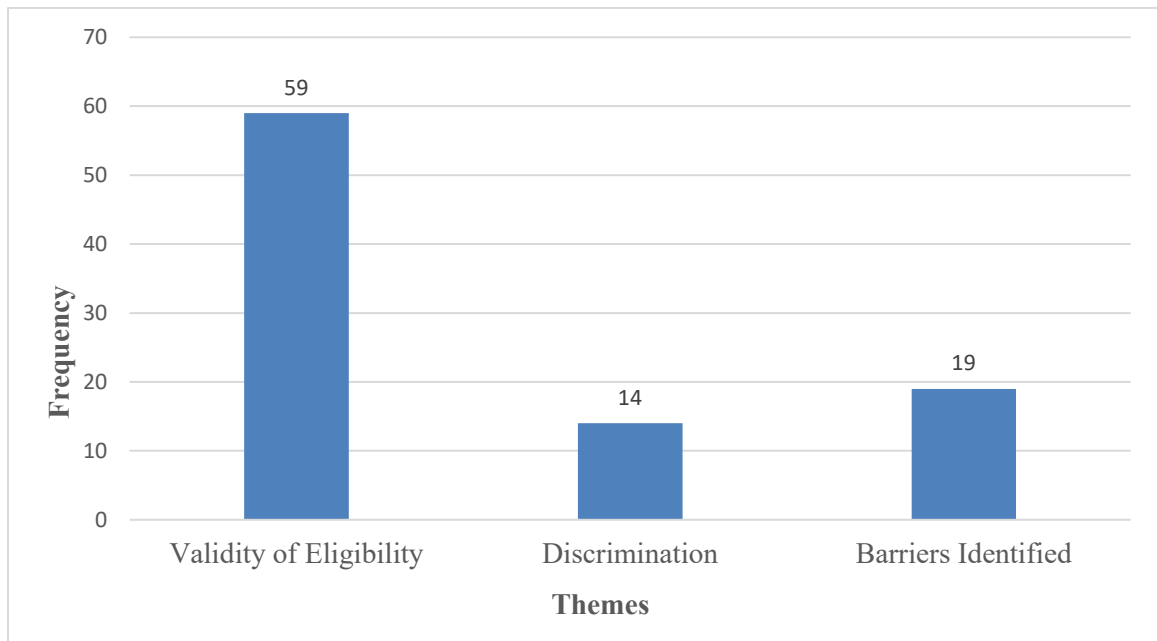
Themes and Subthemes of Perceptions of Current Assessment Model

Themes/Subtheme	Number of Respondents	Artifact Sources	Frequency of Reference
1. Validity of Eligibility Decisions	12	9	59
1.1 Training	12	7	14
1.2 Use of Professional Judgment	7	2	9
1.3 Practice	5	1	6
2. Discrimination	9	9	14
3. Identified Barriers	5	3	19
3.1 Time	5	2	7
3.2 Change of Thought Process	3	2	6

Note. $n = 12$.

Figure 6

Themes: Current Model Used to Identify SLDs in African American Students



Note. Frequency of responses by theme, $n = 12$.

Theme 1: Validity of Eligibility Decisions

The theme that emerged most commonly about the perceptions of the current assessment model used to identify African American students with SLDs was the validity of the eligibility decision. Ten of the 12 psychologists indicated that not being able to

give a standard IQ test resulted in more uncertainty regarding their findings. For example, psychologist 13 reported:

I think sometimes I feel limited by not having the ability to capture the cognitive scores. I'm feeling like I was lacking information. Especially when test results were inconsistent. I am lacking information that I could typically use for any other student in order to help formulate a decision about eligibility.

Psychologist 11 expressed similar perceptions, stating,

When you're looking at an African American student you don't really get to use those numbers that you get to use with everybody else. Having those numbers makes it a whole lot easier to determine if there is a discrepancy and that they are eligible for special ed.

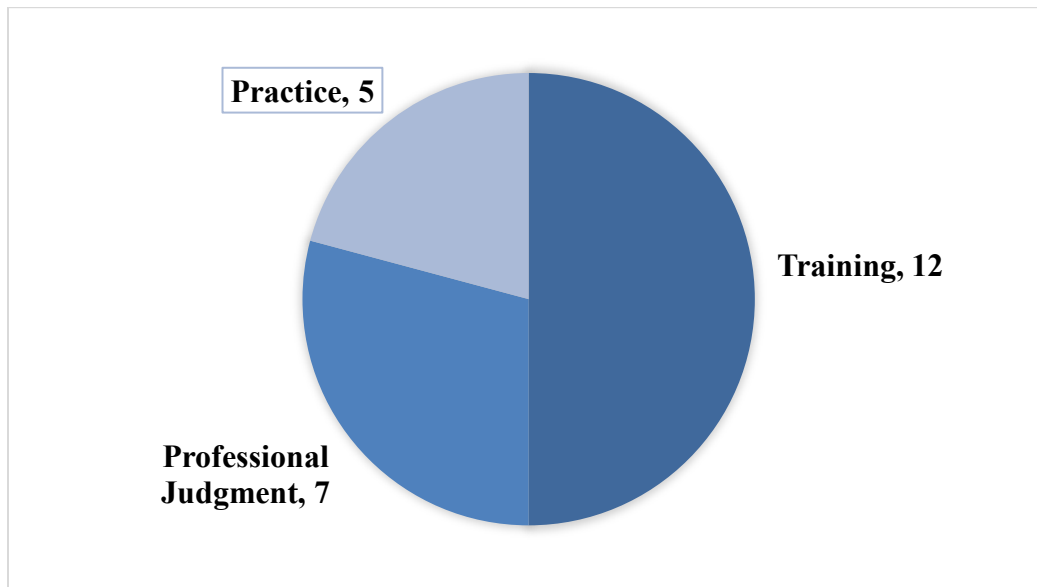
Psychologists also identified that not giving an IQ test to an African American student may result in misrepresentation of the student and inconsistent eligibility for special education services. Psychologist 6 stated,

I had one student who I'm almost positive would have qualified using the discrepancy model but because I didn't have a hard, fast number [IQ score], I couldn't qualify the student even though there were areas of strength and weaknesses.

Three subthemes emerged when examining psychologists' perceptions of the validity of their eligibility decisions when identifying African American students with SLDs. The first subtheme is the role of training in their decision-making process. The second subtheme was the role of professional judgment in the identification of African American students with SLDs. The third subtheme was the role of practice and experience in the identification of African American students with SLDs. Figure 7 provides a visual representation of the data collected related to this theme.

Figure 7

Validity of Eligibility Decisions



Note. Number of responses, $n = 12$.

Subtheme 1.1: Training

Of the 12 psychologists interviewed, 10 indicated that they had little or no formal training in Riverside County SELPA’s Alternative Assessment Guidelines. Two psychologists, both with 30 years of experience in their district, indicated that they were involved in the process of developing the alternative guidelines. Those two psychologists were the only ones to say that they received any formal training in the alternative assessment process. When asked about their knowledge and training in the Riverside County SELPA’s alternative assessment process, the nine psychologists reported that they had no formal training and two shared that they had never read the alternative assessment document. One psychologist reported that she received informal training from another psychologist. Psychologist 5 stated, “I’ve had no training whatsoever in it in it [the Riverside County Alternative Assessment Model], other than, you know, the fact that is posted on the SELPA website. And so, I’ve looked at it and read it.”

Psychologist 7 stated, “To be honest, I don’t remember receiving any training related to that [the Riverside County Alternative Assessment Model].” Psychologist 9 shared, “I wish that our district would provide more training when it comes to that. I think that it should be mandated or built into our professional development.”

Subtheme 1.2: Use of Professional Judgment

The second subtheme that emerged in the perceptions of school psychologists’ validity of eligibility decisions in identifying African American students with SLDs is the subjectivity associated with the use of professional judgment. Seven psychologists reported that subjectivity and professional judgment in their assessment process could affect the validity of their assessment results. When discussing perceptions of the SELPA model, psychologist 12 shared, “I don’t think is strong enough to allow us to really consistently apply that across the SELPA. You can bring in a lot of subjectivity, more so than you would with other models.” Psychologist 13 expressed similar concerns about the SELPA model, stating, “It’s not very concrete and there is a lot of areas to use clinical judgment.”

Subtheme 1.3: Limited Experience/Practice

The third subtheme to emerge regarding perceptions of the assessment of African American students was limited experience. Five of the psychologists expressed concern that the validity of their eligibility decision was affected by a lack of practice or experience in utilizing alternative assessments for African American students.

Psychologist 13 stated,

If you’re in a particular place like myself where the number of African American students assessed each year isn’t high; then you don’t really have hundreds of students behind that case to be able to look at that case. A big piece of it is feeling

less experienced, less confident. It's not something that I feel that I have much expertise.

A majority of psychologists indicated that they assess fewer than five students of African American descent every year, noting that the limited number of cases resulted in more frustration when attempting to correctly identify African American students without using a standard IQ test. Psychologist 3 shared, "We don't get a lot of African American assessments in [our district]. We are highly Hispanic. I have one or two a year at the most, and sometimes, none." Psychologist 4 stated that the lack of experience in the assessment of African American students made answering the interview questions difficult.

Theme 2: Discrimination

The second theme to emerge regarding psychologists' perceptions was the notion that the current model used to assess African American students may be a form of discrimination. Nine of the 12 respondents indicated that using a separate model to assess African American students may be a form of discrimination. Psychologists reported that not allowing cognitive assessment may result in an underestimation of a student's potential. Psychologist 9 expressed, "I just wonder, if this is even something that's beneficial or actually hinders kids because it doesn't give us an insight into how they understand cognitive language and their cognitive abilities." Psychologist 13 also stated, "It's discriminatory in the opposite way. The students are not being given the same opportunities to show their skills."

Not only are the psychologists concerned that the process may be discriminatory, but they also often must explain to parents of African American students that California state law prohibits cognitive assessment of their children. Many psychologists echoed

that parents of African American students have expressed they feel it is a form of discrimination against their child. Psychologist 2 shared,

I recall one time where the parent was a little upset with me feeling like we were actually discriminating against her child because we said we couldn't do cognitive assessment based on Larry P. I explained to her that the cognitive assessment is culturally biased. Then she questioned me. Wouldn't it be the same for a Hispanic child that comes from lack of resources? And so that was a little challenging for me.

In *Crawford v. Honig* (1992), the judge ruled that the ban on IQ testing of African American students based solely on their race denied parent the right to a full range of assessment opportunities.

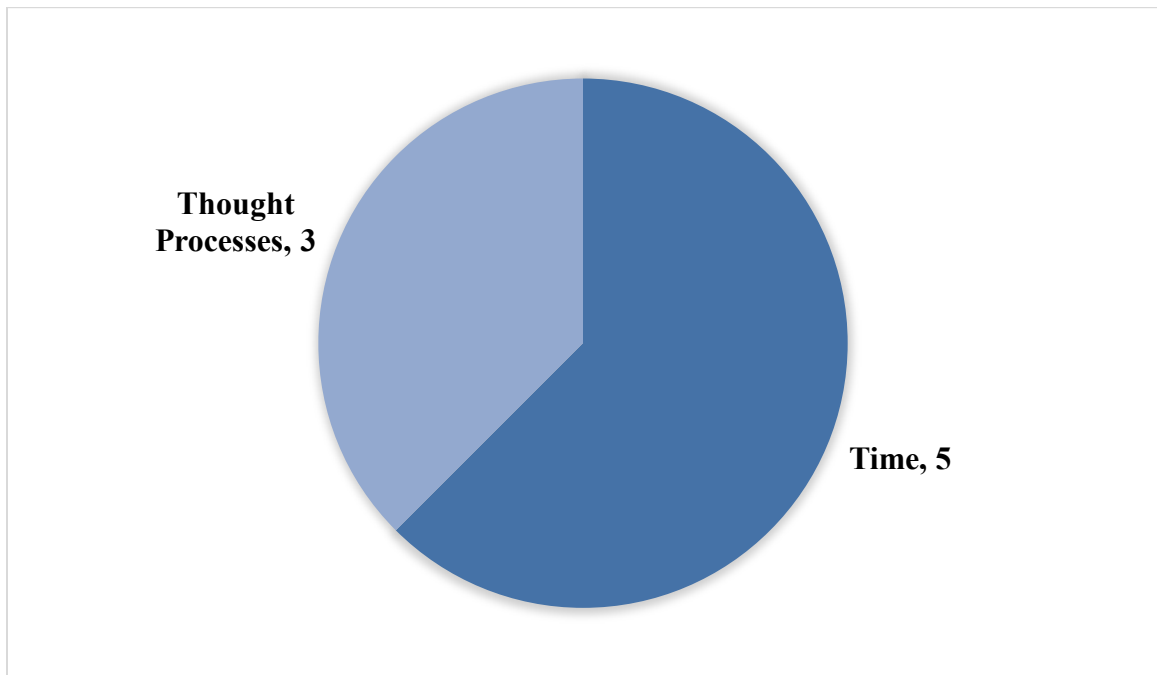
Three psychologists shared instances in which parents changed their child's ethnic designation to allow for a cognitive assessment or issues of assessment of biracial children. Psychologists also shared stories of having to redact cognitive scores from out-of-state reports. Psychologist 7 stated, "Also, I've had the experience where parents don't want to disclose what their ethnicity is and then you're kind of in a conundrum about what you should do."

Theme 3: Identified Barriers

The third theme that emerged in school psychologists' perceptions of the current assessment model used to identify African American students with SLDs was barriers identified in the current assessment model. Five psychologists identified unique barriers that affect their assessment of African American students: time and thought processes. Figure 8 provides a visual representation of the themes identified.

Figure 8

Perceived Barriers in Assessment



Note. Number of responders, $n = 12$.

Subtheme 3.1: Time

The most common barrier identified was time. Five of the 12 psychologists reported that assessment of African American students takes more time than other assessments. Psychologist 5 shared his perception of the current SELPA model, stating,

I feel that it's kind of hugely cumbersome, the way that it's set up with all of the multiple forms. I just can't imagine anyone except for maybe a few people who are very detail oriented beyond my own ability that would bring all of that to bear on a case. You wind up with eight or nine different tables.

Psychologist 10 expressed similar concerns about the SELPA model, stating, "It's time consuming and it's sort of a different way, you know, plotting out all those little numbers and all those test scores and it takes a lot of time."

Subtheme 3.2: Thought Processes

The second subtheme in perceived barriers in the assessment of African American students is a shift in thought processes about assessment. Three of the 12 respondents indicated that assessment of African American students is sometimes frustrating due to the psychologist having to mentally stop and rethink their assessment process.

Psychologist 13 expressed that assessment of African American students takes “a different perspective.” Psychologist 5 stated,

And I think that feels not precise and therefore like oh my gosh there’s too much discomfort in this, we just really don’t have a strong bottom line on things. I found that there’s just this rush to give me an example. Give me a perfect example so that I can follow it. People want a template to stamp and go. Alright, we’re going to do them all like this. Then the kid come in and the next one is very different. You can’t assess them the same way.

Research Question 3

What do school psychologists in three unified school districts in Riverside County perceive is the assessment model that most accurately identifies specific learning disabilities in K-12 African American students?

When asked which assessment model they believe is most accurate in identifying African American students with SLDs, a majority of psychologists identified PSW as the most accurate model, with eight psychologists identifying a preference for using PSW. PSW was also identified as the most accurate method in the assessment of African American students in three artifacts (CASE *Larry P. Assessments FAQ*, Riverside County Alternative Assessment Guidelines, and CASP 2017 Letter to CDE).

Two psychologists felt RtI was the preferred method. When assessing an African American student, Psychologist 4 stated, “The response to intervention might be a little bit more of an accurate way to approach it. I’m looking at the intervention and looking at

how they responded to it and then also looking at the processing tests.” Psychologist 5 stated, “I would choose RtI. We need to do a better job of intervening and continuing interventions for kids who don’t make gains and meet the growth after however much time.”

Two psychologists identified the discrepancy model as the preferred method but only if they could use cognitive testing with African American students. Psychologist 9 reported,

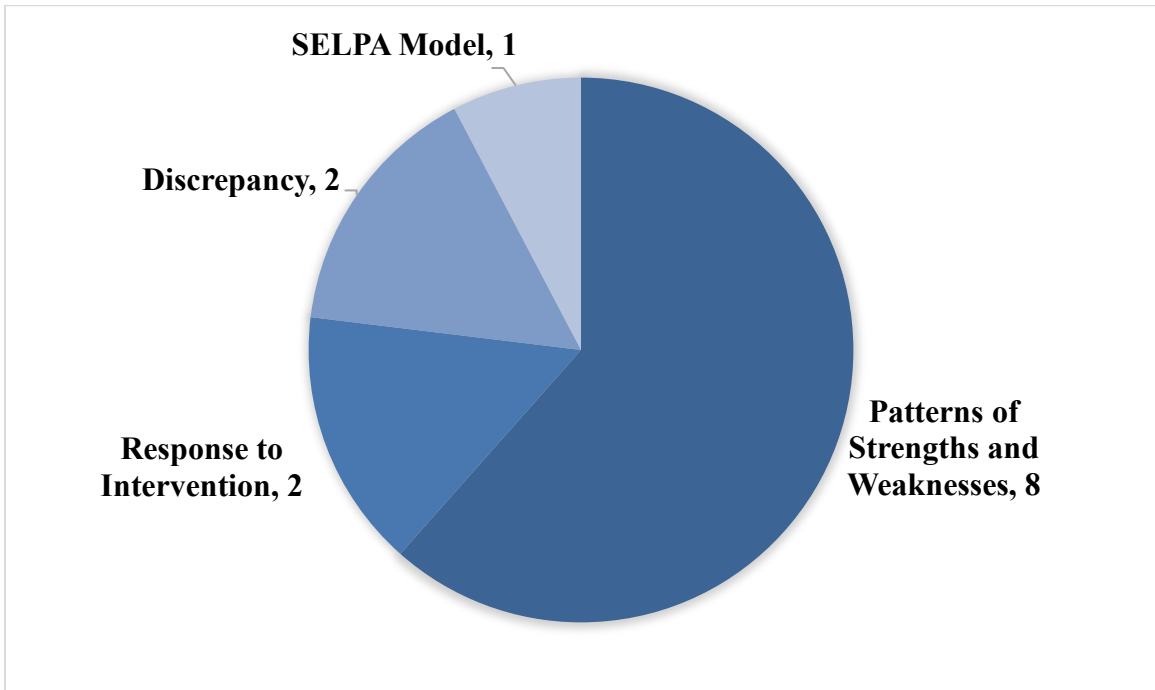
If I could give an intelligence test, I would probably use a discrepancy model. The discrepancy model is the way I was trained. I would just feel a bit more confident in what I am determining. More data makes me feel more confident.

One psychologist shared that he liked the flexibility of the SELPA MATRIX Model and believed that the breadth of the assessment was generally accurate, but preferred the intervention tied to the RtI model. Figure 9 illustrates the psychologists’ responses related to the model they perceived to be most accurate in identifying African American students with SLDs.

When asked to elaborate further on why a particular assessment model was chosen as the most accurate to identify African Americans with SLDs, common themes emerged in their thought processes. Psychologists’ reasons for identifying a particular model as well as data from artifacts were used to develop common themes to identify which model was perceived as the most accurate in the identification of SLDs. Examination of interview data and artifact data yielded two primary themes under research question 3: legally defensible assessment and bias.

Figure 9

Assessment Model Perceived as Most Accurate by School Psychologists



Note. Number of responses, $n = 12$.

Table 11 shows the themes and subthemes that emerged from the interviews and artifacts, illustrating that of the 21 data files, legally defensible assessment was referenced in 16 files for a total of 43 references. Legally defensible assessment was referenced in 11 of the 12 interviews and five artifacts. Legally defensible assessment was composed of the following subthemes: consistent assessment practices, authentic comprehensive assessment, and guidelines. The most common subtheme identified was consistent assessment practices.

Table 11*Themes/Subthemes of Perceptions of Current Assessment Model*

Themes/Subtheme	Number of Respondents	Artifact Sources	Frequency of Responses
Legally Defensible Assessment	11	5	48
Consistent Assessment Practices	4	4	16
Authentic Comprehensive Assessment Guidelines	4	4	16
Bias	5	1	11
Test Bias	6	6	26
Cultural Bias	6	6	19
Cultural Bias	2	2	6

Note. Frequency of Responses, $n = 12$ (12 respondents, nine artifacts).

Theme 1: Legally Defensible Assessment

The theme of a legally defensible assessment was the most common theme identified in the data. Psychologist 6 stated, “I don’t know if PSW is the most accurate but think it is the safest, legal way to do it [assessment].” Psychologist 13 elaborated on the theme by stating that PSW has “more research and it’s more of a rigorous model. There’s data behind it. There’s statistics involved in it.” Psychologist 5 shared, “I don’t really want to go out there on an individual limb there and open myself up or a district up to some kind of liability.”

Subtheme 1.1: Consistent Assessment Practices for All Students

The first subtheme that emerged was recognition of the need for consistent assessment practices for all students. The need for one consistent model of assessment across all ethnic groups was identified in 10 of the data sources. Eight psychologists and two artifacts referenced this subtheme for a total of 16 references. In CASP’s letter to the CDE, CASP stated that “CDE’s 40-year-old ban places school psychologists in the untenable position of being required to perform assessments that are substantively different for students whose skin happens to be black compared to other groups”

(California Association of School Psychologists, 2017, p.1). Psychologist 13 stated, “I would like it to be uniform one way or the other. We should be assessing similarly across the district, for all students, regardless of race.”

Four psychologists indicate that they would like to see changes to the *Larry P.* restriction and be able to give IQ tests to all students. Two of those psychologists specifically stated that they would feel more confident in the accuracy of their assessments of African American students if they could give a cognitive assessment.

Psychologist 6 stated,

I would like to give the same measures across all students that way I’m sure it is accurate in that I have looked at all processing areas including giving IQ tests. I don’t think that taking one measure off the plate makes for better decision making. I think instead testing as much as you can because the more you have, the better your decisions will be supported.

Although some psychologists mentioned the need for a uniform, consistent assessment model used for all children, four others stressed the role of professional judgment in the assessment process. The use of professional judgment in the assessment process is also supported by two artifacts. The CASP Letter to CDE, which states, “The *Larry P.* injunction prohibiting the use of intelligence tests for African American students, undermines California school psychologists’ ability to determine the most appropriate assessment tools to collect the information relevant to the questions of disability” (California Association for School Psychologists, 2017, p. 2). Additionally, the Riverside County SELPA Assessment of African American students states,

The California Association of School Psychologists (CASP) challenged the CDE arguing that the legal advisory and compliance report were incorrect as a matter of law; and that school psychologists had the sole right to determine to whom IQ tests must be given or not given. (Riverside County SELPA, 2015, p. 2)

Two psychologists indicated that sometimes professional judgment is used as a way of manipulating test results to qualify students. Psychologist 1 stated, “You can massage the scores to fit what you feel is appropriate in the case, whether it’s that they qualify or do not qualify.”

Subtheme 1.2: Authentic Comprehensive Assessment

The second most common subtheme in legally defensible assessment was the subtheme of authentic comprehensive assessment, which was identified in eight sources for a total of 16 references. It was mentioned by four of the school psychologists and supported in four artifacts. The NASP’s (2020) Principles for Professional Ethics state that an authentic, comprehensive psychoeducational assessment is “based on a variety of different types of information from different sources” (p. 47). Psychologist 1 stated,

I think you can get a lot of valuable information from the people that are working with these students—from teachers to parents. I think we over rely on the actual test data and not on how they are performing. The tests say one thing, but performance says something else. I think we need to look at both. You can’t get what is authentic information in a contrived one-on-one testing experience.

Three psychologists reported that they use observations across multiple settings to ensure an authentic assessment. Observations were also supported by one artifact, the Riverside County SELPA’s Alternative Assessment Guidelines. Two psychologists reported using interviews with teachers and parents to gain a picture of the *whole child*. Use of interviews was supported in the Riverside County SELPA’s Alternative Assessment Guidelines.

Subtheme 1.3: Guidelines

The third subtheme in legally defensible assessments was the need for clearer guidelines for the assessment process. Six sources indicated the need for clearer

guidelines around the assessment of African American students. Five school psychologists reported that the lack of guidelines from the state was frustrating. Psychologist 7 shared, “I think it would be a lot better if we had universal guidance for [the assessment of] all kids.”

Theme 2: Bias

The second theme that emerged from the data was the impact of bias when assessing students of African American descent. Bias was identified by 12 sources and referenced 26 times. Six psychologists referenced issues of both test bias and cultural bias having an impact their assessment of African American students.

Subtheme 2.1: Test Bias

Six psychologists identified test bias as a subtheme in conducting a legally defensible assessment of an African American student. The American Psychological Association defines test bias as “the tendency of scores on a test to systematically over- or underestimate the true performance of individuals to whom that test is administered, particularly because they are members of specific groups” (e.g., ethnic minorities, one or the other gender; VandenBos, 2015). IDEA (2004) prohibits the use of discriminatory testing and evaluation materials for all students. Test bias was referenced in six artifacts. Psychologist 5 shared, “I don’t know that most of our assessment measures really can be cleaned up in terms of possibly having some sort of bias or discriminatory aspects in the testing.” The only court case examining test bias was *Parents in Action on Special Education (PASE) v. Hannon* (1980). In that case out of Chicago, items on the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children, Revised (WISC-R) and Stanford-Binet Scales of Intelligence (SB) were reviewed for bias item by item. Findings from that case

determined that the WISC-R and SB IQ tests were not biased against African American students (*PASE v. Hannon*, 1980). The ruling in *PASE v. Hannon* (1980) was contrary to the *Larry P.* (1979) ruling in which standardized IQ tests were determined to be biased against African American students. In *Crawford v. Honig* (1992), the judge ruled that the ban on IQ tests deprived Black students the full range of assessment opportunities solely on the basis of race, but the judge did not reach a conclusion on whether the IQ test were biased.

Subtheme 2.2: Cultural Bias

Two psychologists discussed the role of cultural bias in the assessment process. The American Psychological Association defines cultural bias as “the tendency to interpret and judge phenomena in terms of the distinctive values, beliefs, and other characteristics of the society or community to which one belongs” (VandenBos, 2015). Psychologist 11 shared, “There is always that unconscious bias. There’s not hardly a way around it. You automatically have this expectation of how performance is going to be.” She elaborated further,

When you don’t have that same cultural background or an understanding of the culture. Sometimes you may not know how to communicate with individual. That’s where I think it’s good to where you can have that community individual that can help you communicate.

Psychologist 5 shared,

I am concerned that’s just inherently there is a kind of a biased way of looking at African Americans across time and maybe that’s because of the history of what has happened to African Americans as a people in this country.

Summary

Chapter IV presented the data analysis and findings of the research related to school psychologists’ perceptions of the assessment and identification of African

American students with SLDs. Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 12 school psychologists. Nine artifacts were also reviewed to validate interview data. For each research question, data was coded into themes using NVIVO software. A summary of the findings by research question is provided subsequently.

Findings for Research Question 1

Research question 1 examined what assessment models are currently used to identify African American students with SLDs. Answers to this question varied even among psychologists employed by the same school district. Responses were divided with four psychologists identifying the PSW model whereas four others identified the Riverside County SELPA Matrix Model as the model currently used. Three others responded that they use a discrepancy model. One psychologist indicated that they used elements of both the discrepancy model and RtI to identify African Americans with SLDs.

Findings for Research Question 2

Research question 2 examined the perceptions school psychologists held about the current assessment model used to identify African American students with SLDs. Three themes emerged when examining the data: validity of eligibility decisions, discrimination, and barriers in assessment.

The most common theme identified was the validity of eligibility decisions. Ten of the 12 psychologists indicated that not being able to give a standard IQ test resulted in greater uncertainty of their findings. Psychologists also identified that not giving an IQ test to an African American student may result in misrepresentation of the student and inconsistent eligibility for special education services.

Three subthemes emerged when examining psychologists' perceptions of the validity of their eligibility decisions when identifying African American students with SLDs. Subthemes identified included the role of training in their decision-making process and the use of professional judgment in the identification of African American students with SLDs. The final subtheme was the role of practice and experience in the identification of African American students with SLDs.

The second theme to emerge in psychologists' perceptions was the theme that the current model used to assess African American students may be a form of discrimination. Nine of the 12 respondents indicated that using a separate model to assess African American students may be a form of discrimination. Psychologists reported that not allowing cognitive assessment may result in an underestimation of the student's potential.

The final theme that emerged in the perceptions of school psychologists about the current assessment model used to identify African American students with SLD was barriers identified in the current assessment model. Barriers identified by respondents included time and thought processes.

Findings for Research Question 3

What do school psychologists in three unified school districts in Riverside County perceive is the assessment model that most accurately identifies specific learning disabilities in K-12 African American students?

Two primary themes emerged to justify their perception of the most accurate assessment model to use in the identification of African American students with SLDs: legally defensible assessment and bias. The first theme was to ensure that students received a legally defensible assessment. Subthemes that emerged in the theme of legally

defensible assessment included the perceptions of conducting a consistent and fair assessment, conducting a comprehensive assessment, and following guidelines provided by the state or SELPA. The second theme that emerged was that school psychologists must be aware of how bias affects the assessment of African American students. Two types of bias were identified. Psychologists discussed the need to understand the role of cultural and test bias in their assessment process. Psychologists shared that they were unsure as to whether tests continue to be biased so long after the original *Larry P.* decision.

Chapter IV contained an analysis of the data and the findings that resulted. Chapter V provides a detailed discussion of the findings, including unexpected findings. The chapter provides conclusions reached after examining the findings in the study and implications for action. Chapter V also discusses recommendations for further research, final remarks, and reflections.

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

This qualitative study describes school psychologists' perceptions of the assessment models used to identify African American students with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLDs). Chapter V begins with a summary of the purpose, research questions, methodology, and the data collection. Data was gathered through in-depth interviews with school psychologists as well as nine artifacts. Data was analyzed in relation to each of the three research questions. A total of 12 key findings were identified across the three research questions. Conclusions and implications of the findings are discussed. In conclusion, recommendations for future studies are suggested.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify and describe the assessment models school psychologists use to identify African American students with SLDs in three of the K-12 school districts in Riverside County. A second purpose of this study was to determine how school psychologists within three districts of Riverside County perceive the assessment model used in their school district affects the identification of SLDs in African American students. A third purpose of this study was to determine the assessment model school psychologists in three districts in Riverside County believe most accurately identifies SLDs in African American students.

Research Questions

1. What assessment models do school psychologists in three unified school districts in Riverside County use to identify African American students with specific learning disabilities in their K-12 school district?

2. How do school psychologists in three unified school districts in Riverside County perceive the assessment model used in their district affects the identification of specific learning disabilities in African American students?
3. What do school psychologists in three unified school districts in Riverside County perceive is the assessment model that most accurately identifies specific learning disabilities in K-12 African American students?

Methodology

This study used a qualitative design to gather descriptive data to answer research questions examining school psychologists' perceptions about and current methods used in the assessment of African American students. This study used a generic qualitative approach, which provided rich data to examine the participants' experience.

This study used semi-structured interviews to elicit data about school psychologists' perceptions of the assessment of African American students with SLDs. The study participants were a sample of 12 school psychologists who were employed within one of the three unified school districts (Coachella Valley Unified, Desert Sands Unified, and Palm Springs Unified) within Riverside County.

Interviews were conducted via Zoom and recorded. By recording interviews, the researcher was able to re-examine the original information later to ensure the quality of the written transcripts created for the study. After IRB approval was received, 49 school psychologists employed within the three districts within the Coachella Valley (Coachella Valley Unified, Desert Sands Unified, and Palm Springs Unified) during the 2019-20 school year were identified through an email search. All potential participants were assigned a random number between 1 and 50. Twelve participants were chosen using a

research randomizer and sent an email soliciting their participation. If a participant was unable to be interviewed or did not return the signed written informed consent, another participant was chosen using the randomizer until 12 interviews were conducted. Zoom meetings were recorded, and the audio transcript was saved under the participant's assigned number in a password-protected file on a laptop only accessible to the researcher.

In addition to interview data, artifacts were collected from SELPA and district websites as well as position statements from the California Association of School Psychologists' (CASP) website. The nine artifacts were downloaded and coded in to NVIVO to provide triangulation of data. Artifacts included: the *Larry P. v. Riles* court decision (1979), the CDE legal advisory (Sandoval, 1997), *Crawford v. Honig* (1992), The CDE *Larry P.* Memo (1997), the CASP SLD-PSW position paper (Christo, 2014), the CASP position statement regarding testing of African Americans (Hiramoto & Gamble, 2017), the CASP (2017) letter to the CDE, the Riverside county Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) alternative assessment guidelines, and the Riverside County SELPA guide in assessing African Americans for special education. Data from transcripts and artifacts were entered into NVIVO software to identify common themes.

Population

Charvat (2008) estimated in 2008 that there were 35,400 credentialed school psychologists in the United States with approximately 29,400 primarily employed in public schools. The CDE Educational Demographics Office estimated that during the 2017-2018 school year there were 6,159 school psychologists working in California. Of

the 6,159 school psychologists in the state of California, approximately 335 school psychologists were employed in one of the 35 school districts within Riverside County.

At the time of the study, a total of 210 school psychologists were employed within the Riverside County SELPA. The target population for the study was the 49 school psychologists from three unified school districts within the Coachella Valley region of Riverside County: Coachella Valley Unified, Desert Sands Unified, and Palm Springs Unified.

Sample

Purposeful and convenience sampling were used to gather information about the perceptions of school psychologists working in one of the three unified school districts in the Coachella Valley. The sample was accessible both geographically and via Zoom interview. In 2017, there were 49 school psychologists employed within the Coachella Valley geographic area of the Riverside County SELPA. The sample size was also influenced by saturation. According to Patten (2012), sample saturation occurs at the point in the data collection when additional participants do not identify any additional themes or provide any new information. Saturation often occurs after 12-25 interviews have been conducted. The researcher determined that the sample size for the study was 12 school psychologists in the Coachella Valley in Riverside County SELPA. This sample represents more than 10% of the population.

A research randomizer program was used to choose a random sample of the 12 participants. If a participant indicated that they did not want to participate or did not respond to the initial email, the research randomizer was used to select another participant until 12 individuals were interviewed.

Demographic Data

Thirteen school psychologists agreed to participate in the study. One participant agreed to participate in the interview but then decided to withdraw from the study before the interview. In total, 12 school psychologists were interviewed for this study. Table 12 contains demographic information about the study's respondents. Their years of experience ranged from 2-30 years with a mean of 14.625 years.

Table 12

Participant Demographics

	Gender	Highest Degree	State of Training	Years of Experience
Psychologist #1	Female	Ph.D.	Outside of CA	30 years
Psychologist #2	Female	Masters	CA	6 years
Psychologist #3	Male	Masters	CA	17 years
Psychologist #4	Female	Masters	CA	16.5 years
Psychologist #5	Male	Ph.D.	Outside CA	21 years
Psychologist #6	Female	Masters	CA	2 years
Psychologist #7	Female	Masters	CA	10 years
Psychologist #8 (Discontinued participation)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Psychologist #9	Female	Masters	CA	6 years
Psychologist #10	Female	Masters	CA	28 years
Psychologist #11	Female	Masters	CA	2 years
Psychologist #12	Male	Ph.D.	CA	30 years
Psychologist #13	Female	Masters	Outside CA	7 years

All respondents reported that the number of students assessed in the 2019-2020 school year was reduced due to COVID 19 restrictions and school closures. Table 13 illustrates that the average numbers of assessments completed ranged from 28 to 86 with a mean average of 50.66667. Psychologist 5 had the lowest number of completed assessments but did not work the entire 2019-2020 school year as a psychologist within the district. The number of African American students evaluated in the 2019-2020 school

year ranged from 0 to 10 with a mean average of 3.583. The percentage of African American students tested in the 2019-2020 school year represented 7% of the total number of students assessed.

Table 13

Number of Assessments

	Number of Assessments completed 2019-2020 *	Number of Assessments of African American Students 2019-2020
Psychologist #1	86	3
Psychologist #2	58	1
Psychologist #3	70	2
Psychologist #4	70	0
Psychologist #5	28*	2
Psychologist #6	29	4
Psychologist #7	35	10
Psychologist #8 (Discontinued participation)	N/A	N/A
Psychologist #9	47	5
Psychologist #10	30	5
Psychologist #11	35	3
Psychologist #12	40	3
Psychologist #13	80	5

*Note: *All participants said the number of completed assessments was reduced due to COVID 19 closures. Psychologist 5 did not work for the entire 2019-2020 school year.*

Major Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore school psychologists’ perceptions of the assessment process in the identification of African American students with SLDs. In the state of California as a result of the *Larry P. v. Riles* court ruling and subsequent directives from the CDE, school psychologists are banned from using cognitive assessments in the identification and placement of African American students. This study explored school psychologists’ perceptions of the current assessment model used and what model they perceive to be the most accurate in the assessment of African

American students with SLDs. Based on the findings of this study, school psychologists believe that the current ban on using cognitive assessment of African American students has a significant impact on their ability to correctly identify SLDs in students of African American descent. A summary of the major findings is presented subsequently, organized by each of the three research questions.

Research Question 1

What assessment models do school psychologists in three unified school districts in Riverside County use to identify African American students with specific learning disabilities in their K-12 school district?

Major Finding 1: Lack of Consensus Among School Psychologists About the Assessment Model Used

In this study there was a lack of consensus among school psychologists about the assessment model used to identify African American students with SLDs; models identified varied within the Riverside County SELPA. Four school psychologists indicated that their district uses a PSW model to identify African American students with SLDs. Four others indicated that their district uses the Riverside County SELPA's Alternative Assessment guide to assess African American students. Three others indicated that their district uses the discrepancy model in the assessment of African American students. One responded that their district uses a hybrid model that incorporates both the discrepancy model and RtI. Examination of the data indicates that even psychologists employed within a district identified differing models in use. This finding is consistent with those obtained by Vaughn et al. (2003), who found wide variability in SLD identification within a single district. Maki et al. (2015) and Haight et

al. (2001) found lack of cohesion among identification procedures and practices varied across school districts in the same state. The lack of a clear consensus within the SELPA suggests that school psychologists may be assessing African American students using differing approaches and theoretical constructs. Researchers suggest that varied SLD assessment criteria could result in inconsistent eligibility decisions (Benson et al., 2020; Redfield & Kraft, 2012; Sullivan et al., 2019). Research question 2 examined the school psychologists' perceptions of the model, providing insight into why responses were discrepant.

Research Question 2

How do school psychologists in three unified school districts in Riverside County perceive the assessment model used in their district affects the identification of specific learning disabilities in African American students?

Major Finding 2: Validity of Eligibility Decisions

School psychologists believed that the state ban on giving IQ tests to African American students led to increased concern about the validity of a student's SLD determination and eligibility for special education services. Ten out of the 12 school psychologists reported that the ban on cognitive assessments as a result of the Larry P. ruling made eligibility decisions more uncertain. School psychologists felt that cognitive assessment provided vital information about whether a student had an SLD.

Psychologists questioned whether alternative methods offered valid measures of processing. Many believed that not giving an IQ test provided an incomplete picture of the student's learning profile. Although psychologists maintained that IQ scores would provide more confidence in their ability to identify students with learning disabilities,

Dawson and Simmons (2008) reported that over half of the 404 school psychologists in Northern California they interviewed expressed dissatisfaction with alternative assessment methods used for African American students. Forty-one to 55% of school psychologists felt that alternative assessments did not give the information needed to accurately identify students with special education needs.

Major Finding 3: Gaps in Training

School psychologists reported that gaps in training resulted in them questioning the validity of their eligibility decisions. Although the Riverside County SELPA had published Alternative Assessments Guidelines for the assessment of African American students, 10 out of the 12 psychologists reported having no formal training in the Riverside County SELPA's Alternative Assessment guidance. The only two psychologists who reported being familiar with the guidelines were on the original committee that helped establish the SELPA's guidelines. Both of those psychologists had worked within their district for 30 years. Two psychologists reported being unfamiliar with the guidelines at all. Most others reported that they had to read and "digest" the information on their own because they had never attended a formal training. Six school psychologists reported that they would like to receive additional training and guidance from the SELPA regarding assessment of African American students and the use of the alternative assessment guidelines. These findings are consistent with those obtained by Dawson and Simmons (2008) in which 71% of school psychologists in Northern California reported that their school districts did not have standard protocols or guidelines for assessing African American students.

Major Finding 4: Limited Practice

School psychologists felt that the validity of their eligibility decisions was affected by their limited practice in assessing African American students. A majority of those interviewed reported conducting fewer than five assessments per year on students of African American descent. They reported that assessing so few students per year made it difficult to feel confident in their findings. Respondent 13 elaborated that when the number of African American students assessed each year is low, “Then you don’t have hundreds of students behind the case to be able to look at that case; therefore, a big [barrier] is feeling less experienced, less confident.” Psychologist 4 indicated that although she has been employed as a school psychologist for more than 16 years, she has not tested enough African American students to accurately identify barriers in the assessment and identification of African American students with SLDs. None of the respondents in this study reported testing more than five African American students in a year. Dawson and Simmons (2008) found that 50% of school psychologists surveyed assessed 10% or fewer African American students. However, Dizon (2013) found no correlation between the number of African American students that school psychologists assessed and their confidence in using alternative assessment measures to identify SLDs in African American students. Moreover, Sullivan et al. (2019) found that experience conducting psychoeducational assessments did not increase competence in differential diagnosis of learning disabilities

Major Finding 5: Professional Judgment

School Psychologists frequently use professional judgment when making eligibility decisions of African American students with SLDs. Seven out of 12

psychologists said that because of the ban on IQ tests for African American students, eligibility decisions frequently allowed for the use of professional judgment when determining whether a student meets SLD federal eligibility requirements. These findings are consistent with many previous studies that found that psychologists often used their professional judgment and used a combination of theoretical approaches in the identification of students with SLD (Benson et al., 2020; Cottrell & Barnett, 2016; Maki & Adams, 2018; Maki et al. 2015). Cottrell and Barnett (2015) found that some school psychologists reported using a combination of SLD identification methods that they knew would result in the student qualifying for special education services. Sullivan et al. (2019) reported that school psychologists tended to make eligibility decisions that were unsupported, and even contrary to the data gathered during the evaluation. Benson et al. (2020) posed that such varied approaches could “lead to different SLD decisions; and consequentially, differential and inequitable provision of special education services”. Psychologists in this study also expressed concern that subjectivity in the assessment process would lead to inconsistent identification of African American students. Sullivan et al. posed that subjective and ambiguous disability criterion resulted in school psychologists using professional judgment to make eligibility decisions that were inconsistent with or even contrary to the data collected in the assessment process. As illuminated in a legal examination by Redfield and Kraft (2012), the use of professional judgment by school psychologists may lead to disproportionality in special education. Because studies have shown that students with SLD have a more negative self-concept (Zelege, 2004), lower academic achievement (Judge & Watson, 2011), and poorer post-secondary job outcomes (Cortiella, 2009), proper evaluation and identification of students

with SLD are vital in providing effective intervention to improve these outcomes. Use of differential methods of identification of SLD also poses legal issues related to a student's access to a FAPE that is guaranteed by federal law (Maki, 2018).

Major Finding 6: Racial Discrimination

School psychologists believed that the *Larry P.* ban on the use of IQ tests is a form of racial discrimination. Nine of the 12 respondents questioned whether using an alternative method to assess a specific racial group was discriminatory. Many pointed out instances where parents of African American students wanted their children to be given IQ tests as part of the evaluation and psychologists had to explain to them that doing so is not allowed by California law. Three psychologists reported instances in which a parent changed their child's ethnic destination in order for their child to be tested using an IQ test. In *Crawford v. Honig* (1992), the issue of whether the ban on the use of IQ tests for African American students was heard by the court. The plaintiffs were Black students diagnosed with learning disabilities who wanted to be IQ tested, but were unable to take such tests due to the CDE's expansion of the *Larry P.* decision to include African American students with SLDs. They argued that the CDE's expansion of the *Larry P.* ruling was unsupported and violated the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment. They argued that, in the court's attempt to eliminate what seemed like a discriminatory procedure, they had denied some African Americans the opportunity and constitutional right to take intelligence tests based solely on race. The result was an abandonment of the 1986 expansion, but the decision from *Larry P. v. Riles* still stands and school psychologists within California continue to follow the practice of not administering IQ tests to African American students to determine educational placement.

Major Finding 7: Increased Assessment Time

School psychologists reported that assessing African American students takes more time than other assessments. Five out of 12 respondents reported that the SELPA model takes much more time to complete than giving an IQ test. These findings are consistent with those obtained by Frisby and Henry (2016), who determined that alternative assessment methods are often “considerably more unwieldy and time consuming” than standardized testing. Quinn (2000) determined that it took twice as long to adequately assess a child who is ethnically or linguistically different from the majority. The Riverside County SELPA’s Alternative Assessment Guidelines is a 53-page document that includes 10 multi-page worksheets that address observation, interviews, and record review to gather data about a student’s functioning among five constructs: reasoning, executive functioning, visual spatial, social cognition, and language. Psychologists in this study identified the SELPA’s use of worksheets as cumbersome in the assessment process. Most admitted that due to time limitations, they do not complete the worksheets in the guidelines for every assessment.

Major Finding 8: Change in Thought Processes

School psychologists reported that assessing African American students involves a change in their thought processes. Psychologists also described having to “stop and think” about what assessments to give to African American students to obtain a more complete view of their performance. Three out of 12 psychologists identified that they had to change the way they approach the assessment and the way they analyze the data. These results are consistent with the findings obtained by Powers et al. (2004), who determined that due to unclear or conflicting information regarding the CDE guidelines,

school psychologists may spend additional time and thought to identify which standardized tests can be given legally to African American students. Quinn (2000) determined that assessment of ethnically and/or linguistically minority children takes twice as long due to the added time needed to conduct interviews and take background history. Dizon (2015) found that a majority of school psychologists believed that alternative assessments used to assess African American students lack some areas that are needed to identify disabilities

Research Question 3

What do school psychologists in three unified school districts in Riverside County perceive is the assessment model that most accurately identifies specific learning disabilities in K-12 African American students?

Major Finding 9: Pattern of Strengths and Weaknesses (PSW) Is the Preferred Method of Identification

School psychologists preferred using the PSW framework to identify African American students with SLDs. Eight of the 12 school psychologists preferred using a PSW approach to assess African American students. Respondents reported that they believed the theoretical basis and research behind PSW provides a more uniform and rigorous approach to assessment. Psychologists also believed that using a PSW approach for all children was legally defensible. The results of this study were inconsistent with results of Maki and Adams' (2019) study in which RtI was school psychologist's preferred method of SLD identification. In their study, RtI was identified as the preferred method by 45.5% of psychologists, followed by 31.45 % stating preference for the PSW

approach and 22.99% identifying the discrepancy model as their preferred SLD identification process.

Major Finding 10: Lack of Guidance Influences Validity of Eligibility Decisions

School psychologists reported that the lack of guidance from the CDE negatively affected their ability to accurately identify African American students with SLDs. Four psychologists expressed frustration that CDE has a list of tests that could not be used to assess African American students, but because the list is not continuously updated, it is often up to professional judgment to determine which tests are allowed and which are not allowed. Psychologists reported that they were cautious when assessing African American students because they did not want to use any tests that would later be banned by the CDE.

Major Finding 11: Test Bias and Cultural Bias

School psychologists questioned whether test and cultural bias affect their ability to assess and identify African American students with SLDs. School psychologists questioned whether the tests used today are biased against African American students. The American Psychological Association defines test bias as “the tendency of scores on a test to systematically over- or underestimate the true performance of individuals to whom that test is administered, particularly because they are members of specific groups (e.g., ethnic minorities, one or the other gender)” (VandenBos, 2015). A few participants also speculated that if cognitive tests were biased against African American students, would not the same tests be biased against other groups of children such as English language learners or other racial groups? The issue of test bias is much debated, but research by Gregory et al. (2010) and Skiba et al. (2002) confirms that most modern-day norm-

referenced IQ tests are not psychometrically biased against African American students. Powers et al. (2004) maintained that disproportionality is not due to test bias but rather due to “endemic socio-political inequalities”.

The issue of cultural and implicit bias as the root cause of disproportionality rather than test bias was also identified by two psychologists in this study. Both psychologists wondered about the impact of implicit cultural biases in the referral and assessment process of African American youth. One even posed whether there was some implicit bias in all the tests used for educational placement. These findings were consistent with those obtained by Gregory et al. (2010), Skiba et al. (2002), and Powers et al. (2003), who all proposed that disproportionate representation of African American students in special education is due to a variety of complex factors, including institutional racism and disproportional referral for assessment.

Unexpected Findings

Three unexpected findings emerged from this study’s data.

Unexpected Finding 1

The first unexpected finding was that a majority of the psychologists never received any formal training in the Riverside County SELPA’s Alternative Assessment Guidelines. Because the SELPA is responsible for providing for the special education services needs for students within their boundaries, the SELPA should provide guidance and training to staff in the assessment and identification of students with disabilities. It is the SELPA’s responsibility to collaborate with school districts to guide district policy and facilitate programming for special education students. Powers et al. (2014) emphasized that the SELPA is responsible for ensuring that there is a system for identification,

assessment, and placement of students with disabilities throughout California. Guidance and training from the SELPA are also needed provide uniformity. The use of vague and ambiguous terms both in the IDEA legislations and the *Larry P. v. Riles* rulings lead to issues of reliability and validity in SLD identification and ultimately the placement of students into special education (Kavale & Forness, 2000).

Unexpected Finding 2

A related unexpected finding was that psychologists were unclear as to the theoretical background of the SELPA's alternative model. The Riverside County SELPA Alternative Assessment Guide is a 53-page document that outlines the use of a Matrix system consisting of worksheets, interviews, observation, records review, information assessment activities, and formal testing to assess functioning in the domains of reasoning, executive functioning, visual-spatial skills, social cognition, and language. The psychologists in this study were unsure about the theoretical constructs underlying the model. Some respondents reported that it was in essence a discrepancy model whereas others reported it was based on a PSW model.

Unexpected Finding 3

A third unexpected finding was that many school psychologists had limited knowledge of the background and history of the *Larry P. v. Riles* decision. Five of those in the study posed the question of whether IQ tests continue to be biased or if they are less biased due to being re-normed in the years since *Larry P.* Dizon (2015) found that one-third of California School psychologists were unaware of the origin of the ban on IQ testing and one-third falsely believed that the IQ ban was federally mandated. Although all respondents indicated that *Larry P.* may be a form of reverse discrimination, very few

psychologists raised the issue of implicit bias. Greenwald and Krieger (2006) defined “implicit bias as largely unconscious negative thoughts, attitudes, stereotypes, perceptions, or behaviors that a person is unaware that he or she possesses against members of another ethnic or racial group”. Only the two African American psychologists and one Caucasian psychologist questioned how bias in the school system and society affects the assessment and identification of African American students for special education services. Meta-analytic findings suggest that teachers tend to refer more Hispanic and Black students than White students for evaluation (Hosp & Reschly, 2003).

Conclusions

The findings of this study and review of literature resulted in six conclusions regarding school psychologists’ perceptions of the assessment and identification of SLDs among African American students.

Conclusion 1: Conducting Legally Defensible Assessments

Results of this study concluded that the way African American students are currently assessed for SLD resulted in inconsistent identification and placement that could result in a denial of a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). Denial of FAPE may lead to Due Process Hearings or other legal filings. Rozalski, Yell, and Warner (2021) estimate that 85-90% of all special education litigation is due to disagreement over FAPE. When evaluating whether a district has provided FAPE, Impartial Hearing Officers (IHO) or Administrative Law Judges (ALJ) often use a two-part test that examines whether the school district violated FAPE through either Procedural errors or Substantive errors (Rozalski et al., 2021). Procedural errors are the

result of missing timelines or failing to involve the parent in the assessment process while substantive errors involve whether the student has made educational benefit. Failing to conduct a comprehensive, individualized, and relevant assessment is considered a Substantive violation of FAPE (Rozalski et al. 2021).

Conclusion 2: Training

Results of this study concluded that gaps in training from the SELPA resulted in frustration and inconsistent assessment among school psychologists when conducting a comprehensive evaluation of African American students. Ten of the respondents in this study reported having no formal training in the SELPAs alternative assessment guidelines. These gaps in training resulted in the increased use of professional judgment and inconsistent application of the alternative assessment. Use of professional judgment results in inconsistent identification and placement of African American students into special education services. Inconsistent identification and placement could result in a denial of FAPE and lead to Due Process Hearings or other legal filings.

Conclusion 3: Discrimination

Results of this study concluded using alternative methods for assessing African American students is a form of discrimination. In *Crawford v. Honig* (1992), the judge ruled that the ban on IQ testing for African American students denied Black students of the “full range of assessment opportunities solely because of race” (*Crawford v. Honig*, 1992). Banning the use of IQ tests solely on the basis of race not only denies equal access, it also limits the individual’s ability to demonstrate areas of cognitive strength that can be used to design and implement an Individual Education Plan (IEP). Assessing

African American students using an alternative approach may also increase disproportional representation into special education programs.

Conclusion 4: Accuracy of Student Placement

Results of this study concluded that using alternative assessment procedures when assessing African American students impacts the accuracy of student placement.

Inappropriately labeling children with a disability can have both short- and long-term negative impact. Students identified as having learning disabilities may be placed in more restrictive educational settings (Judge & Watson, 2011). Special Education settings may have less rigorous curriculum and lower expectations that results in lower self-esteem and poorer post-secondary outcomes (Zelege, 2004; Cortiella, 2009).

Conclusion 5: SELPA-Created Barriers

Results of this study concluded that in an effort to comply with the state guidance and regulations, the SELPA has created barriers that adversely affect school psychologists' ability to assess African American students with SLDs efficiently. Guidance from CDE maintains that the SELPA administrator is responsible to assure that a system for identification, assessment and placement for disabled students is in place to ensure that all individuals with disabilities receive FAPE in the least restrictive environment (California Department of Education, 2016). Gaps in training and inconsistent guidance from the SELPA on the assessment of African American students has created barriers that lead to increased assessment time and inconsistent application of the alternative assessment guidelines. Ultimately, these gaps in training and inconsistent guidelines likely result in inconsistent placement decisions.

Conclusion 6: Change in Assessment Mindset

Results of this study concluded that the assessment of African American students results in a change of mindset for the assessor. Gamble and Hiramoto (2021) determined that the *Larry P.* ban on the use of IQ testing for African American students resulted in school psychologists being more focused on what specific tests to use to avoid CDE sanctions rather than focusing on the student's educational needs. The current study found similar results in that the primary focus of psychologists when assessing African American students was their desire to avoid breaking the Larry P. ban on IQ testing. This change of mindset and approach to the assessment of African American students impacts the accurate identification of African American students with SLDs. This change in mindset and approach to assessment may lead to inaccurate identification which impacts the student's ability to access FAPE.

Implications for Action

Examination of the perceptions of school psychologists on the assessment and identification of African American students with learning disabilities resulted in six implications for action.

Implication 1: In-service Training on Issues of Disproportionality

The SELPA should provide yearly in-service training on disproportionality and culturally competent assessment and referral. Disproportionality in the placement of African American students in special education programs continues to be an issue (Powers et al. 2003; Frisby & Henry, 2016). During fall 2017, 13.4% of African American children were served by special education services in the state of California compared to 7.6% of White children and 9.2% of Latinx children (National Center for

Education Statistics, 2021). Therefore, school psychologists, school personnel, and the CDE need to focus on the root causes of disproportionality rather than just focusing on which tests can or cannot be administered to African American students. The 1989 Larry P. Taskforce and the 2010 Larry P. workgroup both suggested the school personnel be provided with in-service training on disproportionality. Since 2003, the state of California does not require ongoing continuing education in the areas of diversity or cultural/linguistic differences for school psychologists (Gamble & Harimoto, 2021). In 2017, CASP published a position statement to CDE that “strongly encouraged the Commission on Teacher Credentialing to mandate continuing education for school psychologists on disproportionality issues” (Hiramoto & Gamble, 2017, p. 6).

Implication 2: SELPA to Survey Psychologists for Training Needs

The SELPA should conduct yearly surveys of psychologists to determine their training needs. The lack of consensus among psychologists in this study about how to accurately identify students with SLDs and how to use the alternative assessment guidelines when assessing African American students, illustrates significant gaps in training. Conducting a survey among psychologists in the district will help identify gaps in training in order to improve accurate identification of students for special education services.

Implication 3: SELPA to Provide Round-Table Discussions

In addition to the SELPA conducting yearly surveys to identify gaps in training, the SELPA should conduct round-table discussions on “hot topics” such as SLD identification methods or other topics related to the role of school psychologists. Holding

these round-table meetings will allow for stakeholders express ideas and develop consensus to ensure that identification methods are consistent throughout the SELPA.

Implication 4: CDE and SELPA to Provide Guidelines on the Assessment and Identification of African American students

The CDE and SELPA should work collaboratively with the California Association of School Psychologists (CASP) to develop clear, consistent guidelines for the assessment of African American students. Hiramoto (2017) found that school psychologists have been reported to the California Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH) for using tests that had not appeared on the CDE banned test lists or for using tests that were previously on the CDE's approved list of tests. School psychologists in this study reported having to go back into files to redact reports that contained scores or analysis of any of the assessment instruments that were once allowed but then later added to the banned test list.

Implication 5. CDE to Lift the Ban on IQ Testing for African American Students

CDE should lift the ban on using IQ tests when conducting a comprehensive assessment of African American students. CASP and National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) have also supported lifting the restrictions on IQ testing for African American students. By lifting the ban on IQ testing of African American students, CDE would reduce compliance paperwork, time spent enforcing compliance, and legal fees associated with enforcement. Powers et al. (2021) determined that between July 2005 and August 2018, 31 cases were reviewed by the California Office of Administrative Hearings Special Education Division (OAH) related to the Larry P. decision.

Implication 6: SELPA and Districts Examine the Referral Process

The SELPA and school districts should examine the special education referral process to determine if inequities in the referral process contribute to disproportionality in special education identification. Examination of the literature related to disproportionality in special education suggests that disproportionality in special education services is not the result of test bias but rather ineffective intervention strategies and institutional bias, including lack of quality teachers, poverty, and lack of opportunity (Dawson & Simmons, 2008; Reardon, 2013; Sharkey, 2013). Kramarczuk Voulgarides et al. (2017) stated that “disproportionality is an educational institutional problem, not a problem of special education”.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study examined school psychologists’ perceptions of the assessment models used to identify African American students with SLDs. Research questions examined perceptions of their current assessment model, including barriers, as well as their perceptions of a more accurate way to identify African American students with SLDs. Based on the analysis of data collected, several recommendations for further research have been identified.

Recommendation 1: Qualitative Study Examining Implicit Bias

It is recommended that qualitative studies examining perceptions of implicit bias be conducted to further examine school psychologists’ understanding of the impact of disproportionality in assessment, identification, and discipline. Because of their role in identification of students with disabilities, examination of school psychologists’

perceptions of bias in the assessment process may provide insight into the root causes of disproportionality in special education programs.

Recommendation 2: Replicate the Study to Other Geographic Areas

It is recommended that the study be replicated to include school psychologists from other geographic areas of California. Expanding the study to other geographic areas would provide data to determine if the results found in this study are consistent or inconsistent across the state.

Recommendation 3: Replicate the Study to Include Areas With Higher Percentages of African American Students

It is recommended that the study be replicated to include school psychologists who assess higher numbers of African American Students to see if their perceptions are consistent with those found in this study. Most of the respondents in this study assessed a small percentage of African American students each year so the results may not be representative of areas with higher percentages of African American students.

Recommendation 4: Conduct a Mixed Methods Study Examining the Referral Process

It is recommended that a mixed methods study be conducted examining the referral process. The literature review of previous studies suggests that disproportionality may be a result of the special education referral process rather than the result of bias testing or the assessment process. Data could include the numbers of referrals held for each ethnic/racial group, perceptions of teachers in the referral process, and the percentage of students qualifying by category.

Recommendation 5: Conduct a Qualitative Survey Comparing Perceptions of Multiple Stakeholders Regarding the Assessment and Identification of African American Students

It is recommended that qualitative survey comparing perceptions of multiple stakeholders of the assessment of African American students be conducted. Including various stakeholders including psychologists, teachers, parents, and administrators would provide data to examine inconsistencies and misinformation about special education and/or learning disabilities that may result in disproportional referral rates.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

As a result of PL 94-142, school systems have the responsibility to provide free and appropriate access to public education to all students regardless of disability. Of the 13 disabilities identified in IDEA (2004), students with SLDs constitute to be the largest group of students receiving special education services. In spite of this fact, there continues to be debate among school psychologists regarding the most accurate method in identification of students with SLDs (Habinsky, 2016; Maki et al., 2015). The three most common methods of identifying students with SLD are the discrepancy model, the RtI model, and PSW model.

Assessment of African American students within the state of California is made more complex due to the *Larry P. v. Riles* (1979) court decision and subsequent CDE ban on the use of standardized IQ tests for students of African American descent. Alternative means of assessment vary throughout the state and are typically outlined by the SELPA, but according to Dawson and Simmons (2008), 71% of California school psychologists reported that their school district did not have standard protocol or guidelines for

assessing African American students. Lack of consistent assessment may result in inaccurate identification of students who are eligible for special education services. Maki (2018) argued that inaccurate identification of students results in denial of a student's access to a FAPE as guaranteed by federal and state law.

In the 40 years since the ruling barring the use of IQ tests in the assessment of African Americans, students of African American descent continue to be overrepresented within special education. As part of a multidisciplinary team, school psychologists have a unique skillset that involves the assessment and identification of students with disabilities. The aim of this study was to examine the perceptions of school psychologists regarding the assessment and identification of African American students with SLDs, including how the *Larry P. v. Riles* (1979) decision continues to affect their practice.

As a fellow school psychologist, conducting this study has been rewarding. After completing my teaching credential and working in a large urban district, I began to explore issues of disproportionality in special education. Disproportionality was a primary reason for my journey to become a school psychologist. Taking time to gather the unique perspectives of my colleagues has provided an opportunity to share their insights and frustrations on a complex topic. My hope is that this research will not only contribute to the body of work but also provide some recommendations for future training and service delivery.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

IDEA Eligibility Categories and Definitions

Autism	means a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age 3, that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences. The term does not apply if a child's educational performance is adversely affected primarily because the child has an emotional disturbance, as defined in paragraph (b)(4) of this section. (ii) A child who manifests the characteristics of "autism" after age 3 could be diagnosed as having "autism" if the criteria in paragraph (c)(1)(i) of this section are satisfied.
Deaf-Blindness	means concomitant hearing and visual impairments, the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or children with blindness.
Deafness	means a hearing impairment that is so severe that the child is impaired in processing linguistic information through hearing, with or without amplification, that adversely affects a child's educational performance.
Emotional Disturbance	is defined as follows: (i) The term means a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance: (A) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors. (B) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers. (C) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances. (D) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression. (E) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems. (ii) The term includes schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance.
Hearing Impairment	means an impairment in hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects a child's educational performance but that is not included under the definition of deafness in this section.

Intellectual Disability	means significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period, that adversely affects a child's educational performance.
Multiple Disabilities	means concomitant impairments (such as mental retardation-blindness, mental retardation-orthopedic impairment, etc.), the combination of which causes such severe educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments. The term does not include deaf-blindness.
Orthopedic Impairment	means a severe orthopedic impairment that adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes impairments caused by congenital anomaly (e.g., clubfoot, absence of some member, etc.), impairments caused by disease (e.g., poliomyelitis, bone tuberculosis, etc.), and impairments from other causes (e.g., cerebral palsy, amputations, and fractures or burns that cause contractures).
Other Health Impairment	means having limited strength, vitality or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment, that (i) Is due to chronic or acute health problems such as asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, and sickle cell anemia; and (ii) Adversely affects a child's educational performance.
Specific Learning Disability	is defined as follows: (i) General. The term means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. (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.
Speech Language Impairment	means a communication disorder, such as stuttering, impaired articulation, a language impairment, or a voice impairment, that adversely affects a child's educational performance.
Traumatic Brain Injury	means an acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force, resulting in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment, or both, that adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term applies to open or closed head injuries resulting in impairments in one or more

areas, such as cognition; language; memory; attention; reasoning; abstract thinking; judgment; problem-solving; sensory, perceptual, and motor abilities; psychosocial behavior; physical functions; information processing; and speech. The term does not apply to brain injuries that are congenital or degenerative, or to brain injuries induced by birth trauma.

Visual impairment means an impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes both partial sight and blindness.

(IDEA: 20 U.S.C. 1401(3)(A) and (B); 1401(26))

Appendix B

Synthesis Matrix

Themes	Sources
Theories of Intelligence and Intelligence Testing	Dizon (2013) Flanagan et al. (2007) Flanagan et al. (2012) Flanagan & Dixon (2014) Hogan (2007) Kamphaus et al. (2005) Kaufman (2008) McGill et al. (2016) McGrew & Flanagan (1998) Sattler (2001) Spearman (1931) Wasserman & Tulsky (2005) Wechsler (2003) Woodcock et al. (2001) Zhu & Weiss (2005)
SLD Definition/SLD Method of Identification	Bocian et al. (1999) Denton (2012) Dombrowski et al. (2004) Ebbinger (2017) Fagan (2000) Flanagan & Alfonso (2011) Flanagan et al. (2010) Fletcher & Vaughn (2009) Giofrè et al. (2017) Hale et al. (2008) Hallahan & Mercer (2001) Jimerson et al. (2007) Kavale (2005) Kavale et al. (1994) Kavale & Spaulding (2008) Kovalski et al. (2013) MacMillan & Forness (1998) Mellard et al. (2010) Reschly (2008) Hosp & Reschly (2004) Stanovich & Siegel (1994) Suzuki & Valencia (1997) VanDerHeyden & Burns (2010) Vaughn et al., (2003) Wong et al. (2008) Ysseldyke (2005)

	Ysseldyke et al. (1982).
Role of the Psychologist	Bramlett et al. (2002) Fagan & Weiss (2007) Farrell (2010) Hosp & Reschly (2004) MacMillan & Reschly (1998)
Cultural Bias in Testing/ <i>Larry P. v. Riles Decision</i>	Brown et al. (1999) Dawson & Simmons (2008) Dizon (2013) <i>Hobson v. Hansen</i> (1967) <i>Larry P. v. Riles</i> (1979) Naglieri & Otero (2017) Powers et al. (2004)
Disproportionality in Special Education Services	Fagan & Wise (2007) Hosp & Reschly (2004) Powers et al. (2004)

Appendix C

Email to District Administrators

6/16/2020

Brandman University Mail | dissertation



Shara CABREROS <scabrero@mail.brandman.edu>

dissertation

1 message

Shara CABREROS <scabrero@mail.brandman.edu>

Tue, Jun 16, 2020 at 7:14 AM

To:

Hello,

My name is Shara Cabreros and I am a doctoral candidate at Brandman University. In order to complete my doctoral dissertation, I am requesting to interview school psychologists who work in your district and surrounding districts to examine the perceptions of school psychologists regarding assessment of students of African-American descent in light of the Larry P. v. Riles restrictions on the use of IQ tests. Research questions focus on their perceptions, training, and experiences in the identification of learning disabilities. Participation is voluntary and the results will be reported without identifying an individual or school district. Interviews will take place over the summer so as not to impact school psychologist's time and duties.

Please respond back to this email indicating that you are granting access to interview those school psychologists who volunteer for this study. Also please contact me if you have concerns

Thank you,
Shara Cabreros

https://mail.google.com/mail/u/1?ik_e1b126fd/2&view_pt&search_all&permthid_thread_a%3Ar/386306105221/0111&siml_msg_a%3Ar/82389c41... 1/1

Appendix D

Copy of Email Sent to Potential Participants

My name is Shara Cabrerros and I am a doctoral candidate at Brandman University. I am requesting that you volunteer to participate in a research study titled: Forty Years After Larry P: School Psychologists' Perceptions in the Assessment of African American Students. You were identified as a possible participant because you currently employed as a school psychologist within Riverside County, CA.

Purpose of the Research:

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of school psychologists regarding assessment of students of African American descent.

Procedures:

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be invited to attend a Zoom interview. You will be asked questions about your perceptions of assessments for Specific Learning Disabilities and how you are currently assessing African American students as a result of the *Larry P v. Riles* decision. The interview should take about 30-45 minutes to complete.

Risks and Benefits:

The study has no identified risks. There are no direct benefits to participants, but the information gathered may be used by districts and universities to improve the training and support of school psychologists and the students they serve.

Compensation:

You will not be compensated for your time and participation in this study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not result in penalty. If you decide to participate, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private and only the researcher and approved research committee members and staff will have access to your responses. In published reports, there will be no information included that will make it possible to identify you. All participants will be assigned a number associated with the interview. Only group information will be reported ensuring anonymity of your responses. Interviews will be recorded in Zoom and be transcribed into a Microsoft Word document using Zoom. The digital recordings will be deleted after transcribed and verified. Transcripts will be stored securely in a password protected laptop and password protected file. After three years all copies of data will be destroyed.

If you would like to participate, please return a signed copy of the Informed Consent via email by July 30, 2020 at [REDACTED] to be included in this study.

If you wish to contact someone other than the researcher regarding the confidentiality of the study, you may contact Brandman University, Institutional Review Board at irb@mail.brandman.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Shara L. Cabreros

Appendix E

Informed Written Consent

Organizational Leadership Ed.D. Program, Brandman University

Dear Participant:

INFORMATION ABOUT: Forty Years After the Larry P. Decision: School Psychologists' Perceptions on the Assessment of African American students with Specific Learning Disabilities is a study examining the current perceptions of school psychologists in the assessment of African American students with Specific Learning Disabilities in the Riverside County SELPA.

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Shara L. Cabrerros, Ed.S., M.Ed.

You are being asked to participate in a research student conducted by Shara L. Cabrerros, Ed.S., M.Ed, a doctoral student from the Organizational Leadership Program at Brandman University. The purpose of this research study is to explore the perceptions of school psychologists in the assessment and identification of African Americans with Specific Learning Disabilities through the lens of the *Larry P. v. Riles* decision and subsequent ban on the use of standardized IQ tests for students of African American descent. The study will also explore how school psychologists use or view various models of assessment such as the discrepancy model, RtI, and PSW in the assessment of African American students. The results of this study may assist districts and SELPAs in adopting assessment procedures that may result in accurate diagnosis and reduce disproportionality of African American students identified with Specific Learning Disabilities. This study may provide much needed information in regard to training and support to school psychologists.

By participating in his study, I agree to participate in an individual interview. The interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes and will be conducted via Zoom and electronically recorded. Completion of the survey will take place in July 2020.

I understand that:

- a) There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research. I understand that the investigator will protect my confidentiality by keeping the identifying codes and research materials in a locked file drawer that is only available to the researcher.
- b) I understand that the interview will be recorded. The recordings will be available only to the researcher - and another researcher who will be verifying the accuracy of the transcripts and the coding of the data. The audio recordings will be used to capture the interview dialogue and to ensure the accuracy of the information collected during the interview. All information will be identifier-redacted, and my confidentiality will be maintained. Three years after the completion of the study all recordings, transcripts, and notes taken by the researcher and transcripts from the interview will be destroyed.
- c) The possible benefit of this study to me is that my input may help add to the research regarding assessment of and accurate identification of African Americans with Specific Learning Disabilities. The findings will be available to me at the conclusion of the study and will provide new insights about current assessment strategies used by school psychologists. I understand that I will not be compensated for my participation.
- d) If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Shara Cabreros at scabrero@mail.brandman.edu or by phone at [REDACTED]; or Dr. Patrick Ainsworth (Advisor) at painsworth@mail.brandman.edu.

e) My participation in this research study is voluntary. I may decide not to participate in the study, and I can withdraw at any time. I can also decide not to answer particular questions during the interview if I so choose. I understand that I may refuse to participate or may withdraw from this study at any time without negative consequences. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any time.

f) No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be so informed, and my consent re-obtained. I understand that if I have questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-9937.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the “Research Participant’s Bill of Rights.” I have read the above and understand it and hereby consent to the procedures set forth.

Signature of Participant

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

Appendix F

Brandman Research Participant's Bill of Rights

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Research Participant's Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.
2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.
4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.
5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.
7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.
8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.
9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the Brandman University Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The Brandman University Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.

Appendix G

Brandman IRB Approval Email

From: Institutional Review Board <my@brandman.edu>
Sent: Friday, July 17, 2020 7:00 AM
To: scabrero@mail.brandman.edu
Cc: painswor@brandman.edu; buirb@brandman.edu; vsmithsa@brandman.edu
Subject: BUIRB Application Approved As Submitted: Shara L. Cabrerros

Dear Shara L. Cabrerros,

Congratulations, your IRB application to conduct research has been approved by the Brandman University Institutional Review Board. This approval grants permission for you to proceed with data collection for your research. Please keep this email for your records, as it will need to be included in your research appendix.

If any issues should arise that are pertinent to your IRB approval, please contact the IRB immediately at BUIRB@brandman.edu. If you need to modify your BUIRB application for any reason, please fill out the "Application Modification Form" before proceeding with your research. The Modification form can be found at the following link: <https://irb.brandman.edu/Applications/Modification.pdf>.

Best wishes for a successful completion of your study.

Thank you,
Doug DeVore, Ed.D.
Professor
Organizational Leadership
BUIRB Chair
ddevore@brandman.edu
www.brandman.edu

Appendix H

Interview Alignment Table

Research Question	Interview Question	Supporting Research
What assessment models do school psychologists in three unified school districts in Riverside County use to identify African American students with specific learning disabilities in their K-12 school district?	What assessment model does your district use to identify African American students with Specific Learning Disabilities? For example, do you rely on the Discrepancy Model, Response to Intervention, Processing Strengths and Weaknesses or some other model.	Hale et al. (2008) Flanagan & Alfonso (2011) Flanagan et al. (2010) Reschley & Hosp (2004) VanDerHeyden & Burns (2010) Yssldyke (2005)
How do school psychologists in three unified school districts in Riverside County perceive the assessment model used in their district affects the identification of specific learning disabilities in African American students?	What is your perception of the Riverside County SELPA assessment model (guidelines) regarding the alternative assessment of African American students? How do the guidelines affect the assessment process? What are some barriers that school psychologists face in the assessment of African American students?	Dawson & Simmons (2008) Dizon (2013)
What do school psychologists in three unified school districts in Riverside County perceive is the assessment model that most accurately identifies specific learning disabilities in K-12 African American students?	What assessment model do you believe most accurately identifies Specific Learning Disabilities in K-12 African American students? Please explain. What are some strengths of using your current process? What are some weaknesses? Do you perceive that African American students are being	Bocian et al. (1999) Bramlett et al. (2002)

	<p>correctly identified, under-identified, or over-identified with Specific Learning Disabilities? Please explain your answer</p> <p>Are there any changes you perceive could improve the accuracy of assessing African American students with Specific Learning Disabilities?</p>	
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Appendix I

Field Test Participant Feedback Questions

- How did you feel about the interview? Do you think you had ample opportunities to share your process and perceptions regarding the identification of students with Specific Learning Disabilities?
- Did you feel the amount of time for the interview was ok?
- Were the questions clear or were there places you were uncertain what was being asked?
- Can you recall any words or terms that were confusing?
- Did I appear comfortable during the interview?
- Do you have any feedback about the use of the on-line platform?

Appendix J

Interview Protocol and Questions

Good morning (afternoon). My name is Shara Cabreros. First, I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview as part of my dissertation. The interview should take 30-45 minutes. Before we start, I want to acknowledge that the written consent and Participants Rights were emailed to you before this interview. I have received your signed written consent to participate and have consented for me to record this interview. I assure you that all your comments will remain confidential, and you have the right to discontinue the interview at any time. Do you have any questions about your rights? Are you comfortable with going ahead with the interview process?

- I would like to start with some questions about your background.
- In which state did you receive your training as a school psychologist and what is your highest degree?
- How many years have you worked as a school psychologist in California?
- During the 2019-2020 school year approximately how many psycho-educational assessments did you complete?
- Of those, approximately how many assessments were conducted with African American students?
- What training have you received from the Riverside County SELPA on identifying Specific Learning Disabilities in African American students?

The next questions are about the assessment and identification of students with Specific Learning Disabilities.

1. What assessment model does your district use to identify African American students with Specific Learning Disabilities? For example, do you rely on the Discrepancy Model, Response to Intervention, Processing Strengths and Weaknesses? or some other model.
2. What is your perception of the Riverside County SELPA assessment model (guidelines) regarding the alternative assessment of African American students? How do the guidelines affect the assessment process?
3. What are some barriers that school psychologists face in the assessment of African American students?
4. What assessment model do you believe most accurately identifies Specific Learning Disabilities in K-12 African American students? Please explain.
5. What are some strengths of using your current process? What are some weaknesses?

6. Do you perceive those African American students are being correctly identified, under-identified, or over-identified with Specific Learning Disabilities? Please explain your answer
7. Are there any changes you perceive could improve the accuracy of assessing African American students with Specific Learning Disabilities?
8. Are there any additional comments you would like to make regarding the identification of African American students with Specific Learning Disabilities?

I want to thank you again for taking time out of your busy schedule to give some insight into psychologists' perceptions in the assessment and identification of African American students.