A Comprehensive Model for Specific Learning Disability Evaluations

COLORADO
Department of Education

Using the *Building Blocks Brain Model of Development* to Understand and Assess Learning Disabilities

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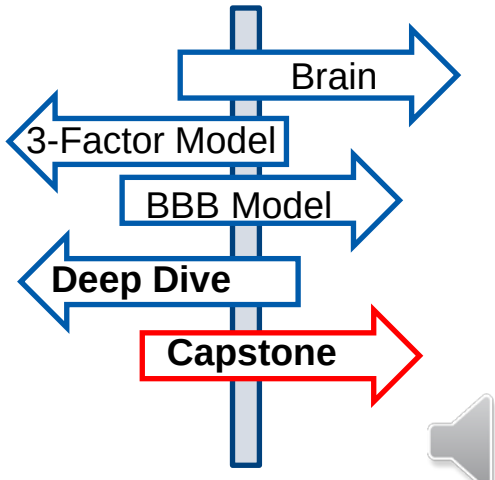
Module 5.1 Guidepost 5

The Building Blocks Brain Model

A DEEPER DIVE: Overall Functioning Achievement



Important Note

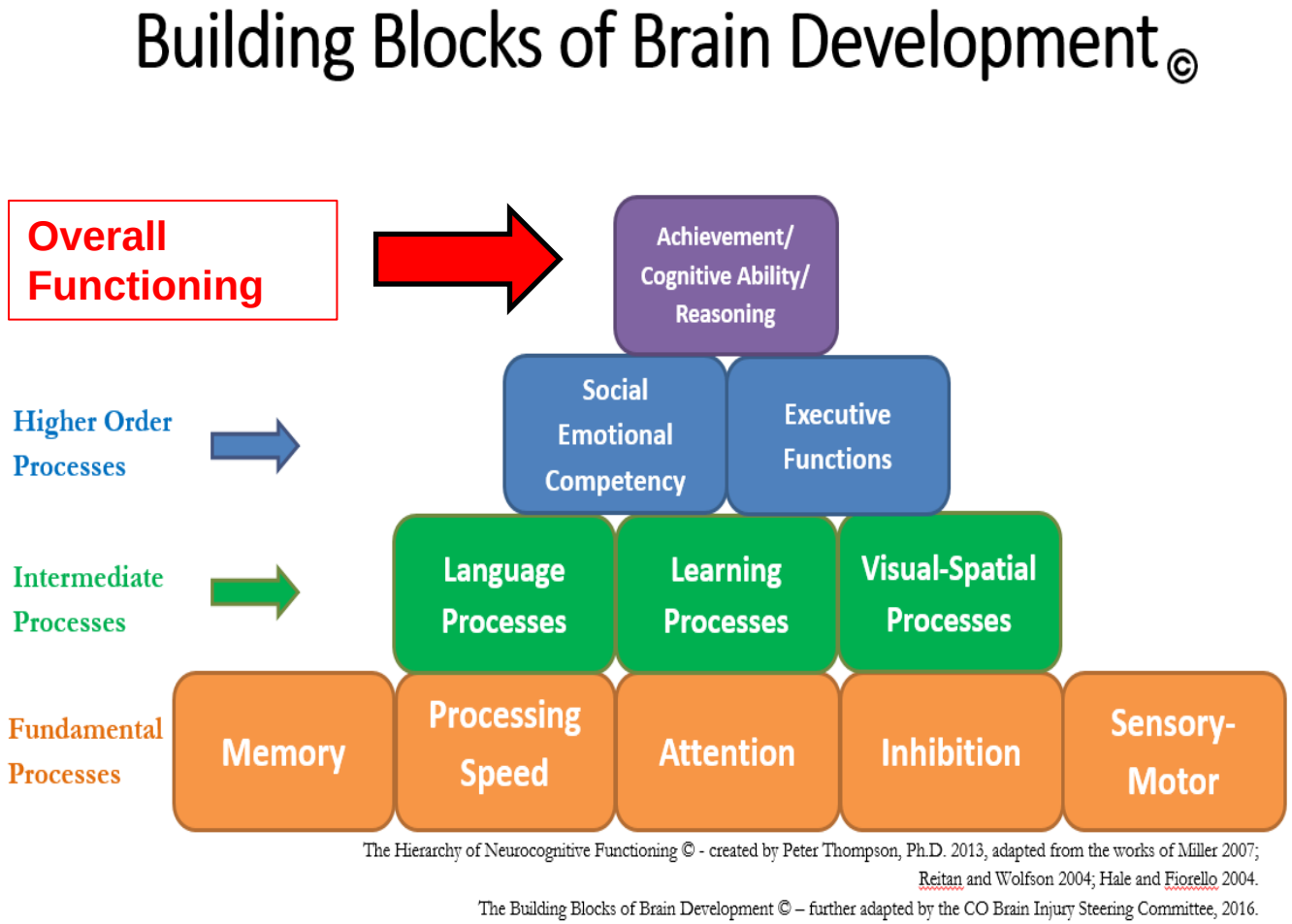
The information, concepts, and models provided in this presentation are intended to give practitioners a framework when conducting special education evaluations. It is emphasized that nothing in this presentation is meant to be directive or prescriptive. Professionals are free to use some, or all of the information presented, but they are not required to do so in their practice. **Always consult with your special education director for clarity around district policies and expectations for special education evaluations.**

Learning Outcomes

- Why is the top of the BBB Model called the “what” block
- Why the “convergence” of data is essential in evaluations
- Why we return to the fundamental level of the BBBM when the capstone block indicates academic struggles or deficits

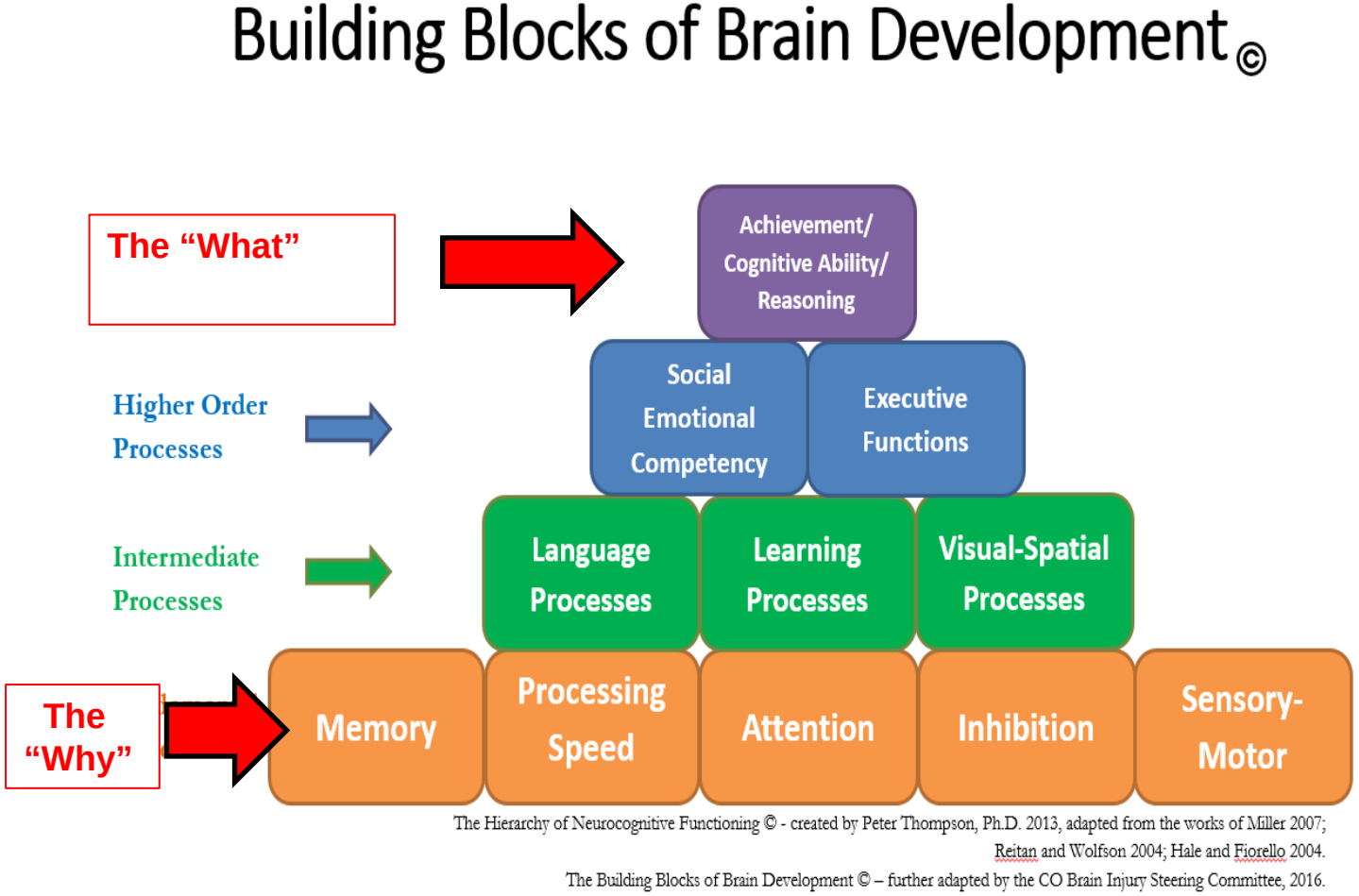
What is Overall Functioning?

- When all blocks are working together in seamless integration, a child makes age-appropriate progress in multiple domains of life
- Achievement and cognitive abilities are within the average range



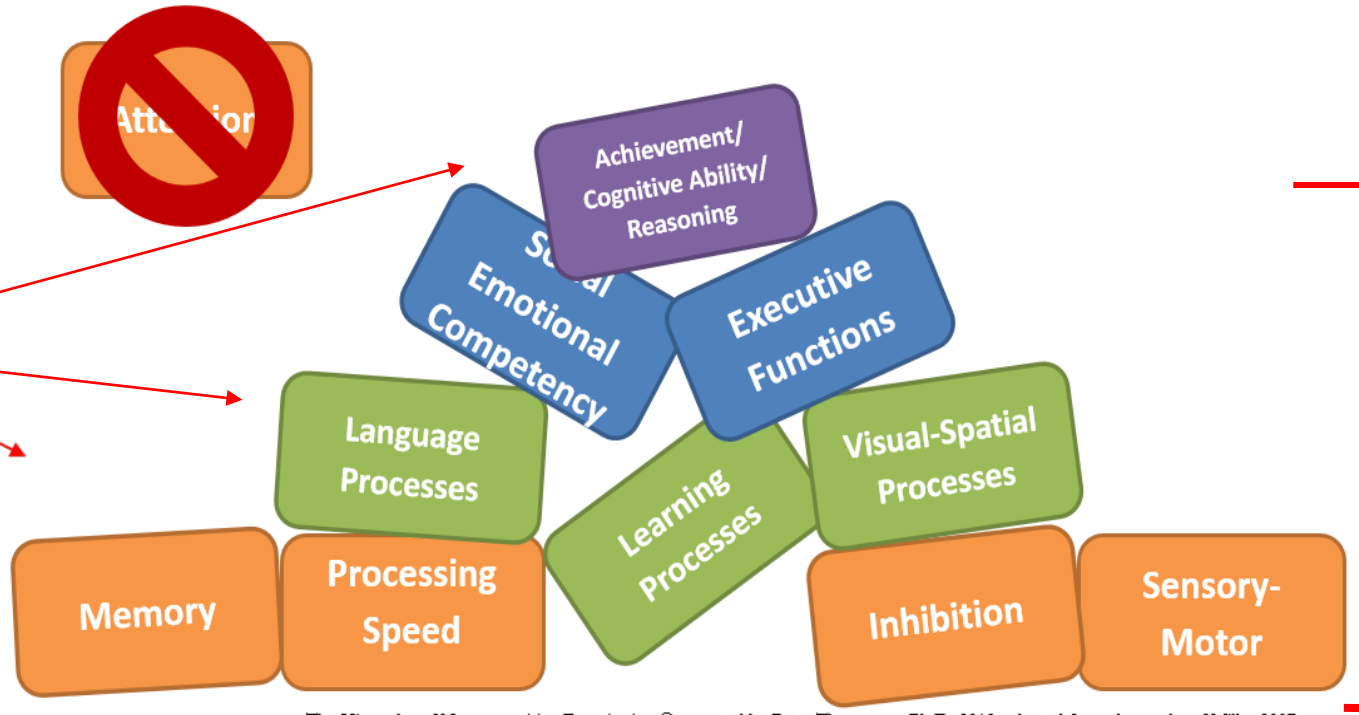
What vs. Why

- When a student is failing, the top block of the BBBM describes the *"What"* of the problem
- The *"Why"* a student is failing is typically answered by finding the crack in one or more blocks at the lower level(s)



Overall Functioning: SLD Implications

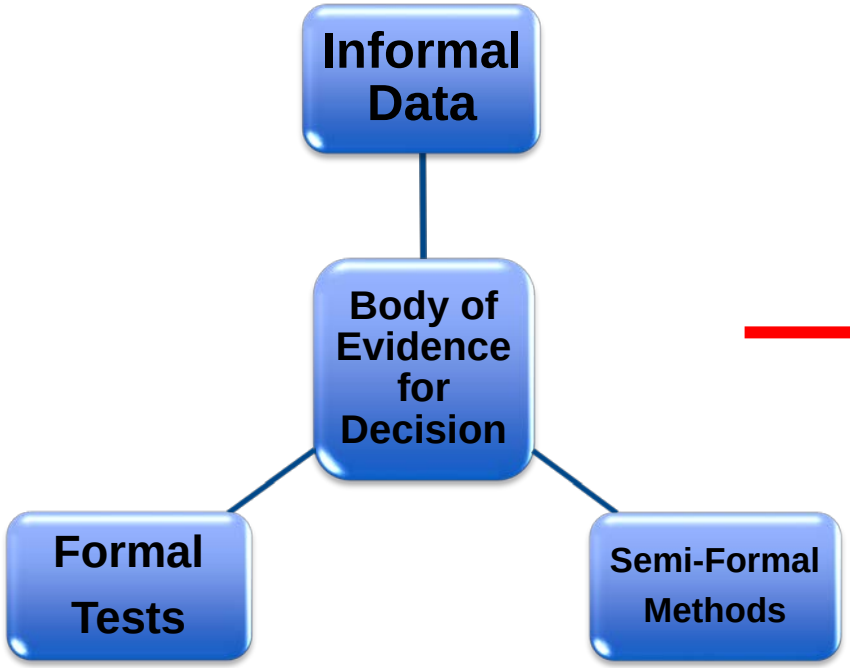
When a neurocognitive block is "weak," achievement can suffer

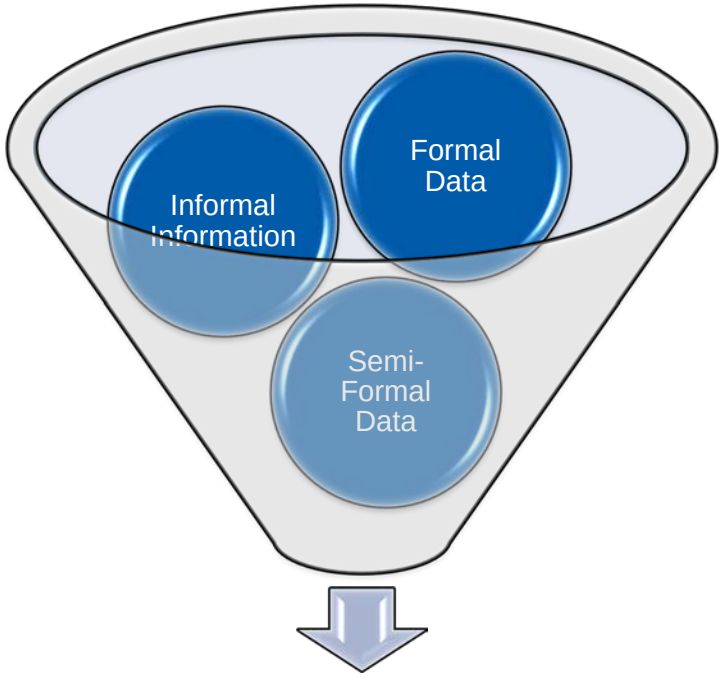


Blocks have integrated functions

The Hierarchy of Neurocognitive Functioning © - created by Peter Thompson, Ph.D. 2013, adapted from the works of Miller 2007; Reitan and Wolfson 2004; Hale and Fiorello 2004.
The Building Blocks of Brain Development © – further adapted by the CO Brain Injury Steering Committee, 2016.

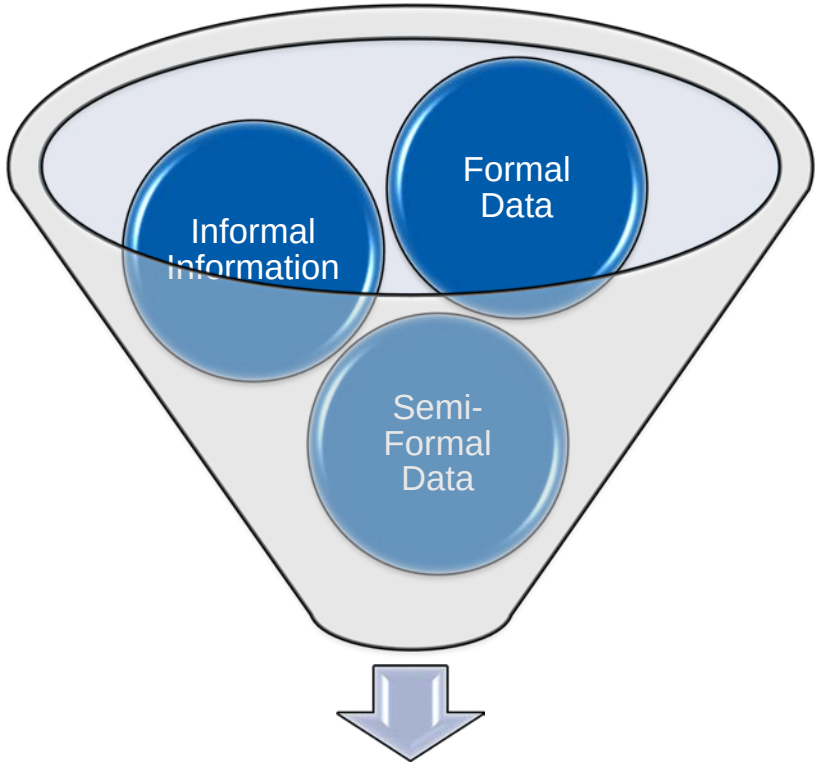
Using the 3 Factor Model in the Convergence of Data





Convergence of Data

Convergence in Learning Disabilities: Helps "Tell the Story"



The Student's Story
What and Why

Case Study: Overview of the Evaluation Process

1. Student identified with low achievement and RTI process begins (Top of BBBM)

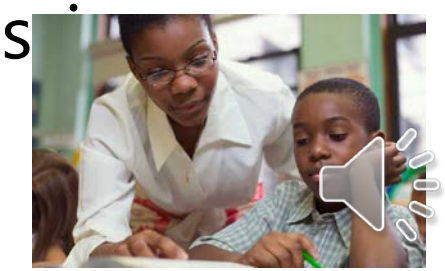
2. Special Education Referral

3. Data collected, RTI, and formal achievement testing-provides specifics on "What" is wrong –refine referral question

4. Employ 3-Factor Model and BBBM- provides the "Why," disability confirmation, and intervention strategies

Brain Building Blocks Model in Action

- Jack: A Case Study
  - 10-Year-old 5th grade student
  - Seemed "average" up to this point
  - As tests and assignments increased in size, Jack struggled in all content / subject areas
  - In class, Jack seems to "space out," needs redirection to focus
  - Asks to repeat directions, seems "lost" in class discus

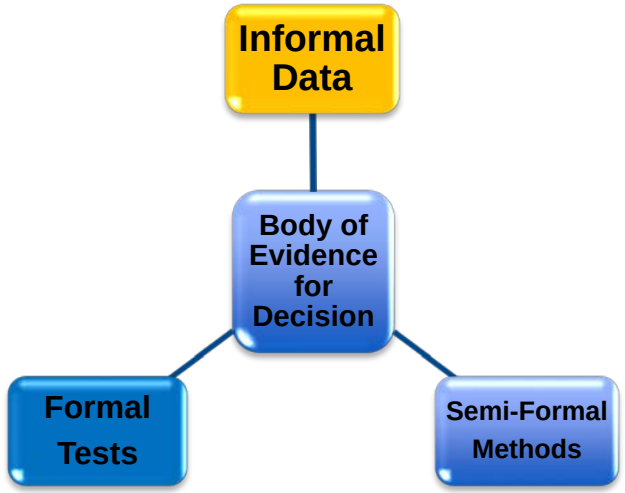


Jack's Case Study Assumptions

- Jack placed in RTI and data collected—He did not respond
- Referral question defined and formal referral to special education team-Jack struggles in all subject area
- Sped team starts with formal data collection and formal achievement testing
- Initial assessment confirms low achievement in all areas

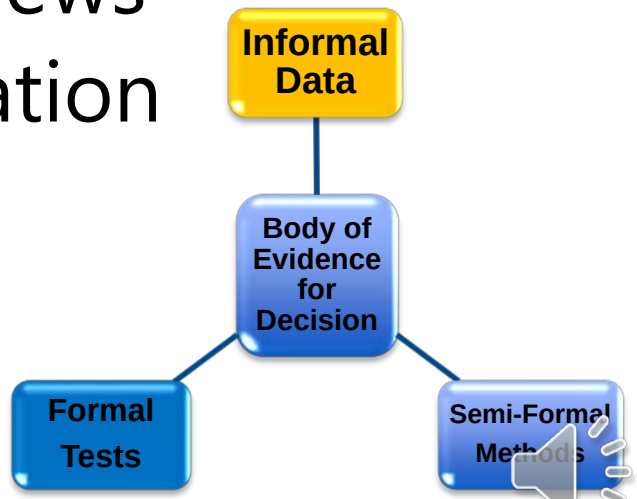
First Step: Review Referral Question And Start With Informal Data

- Observations
- Records review and work sample analysis
- Parent, teacher and student interviews
- Developmental history is key



Informal Data *Discoveries*

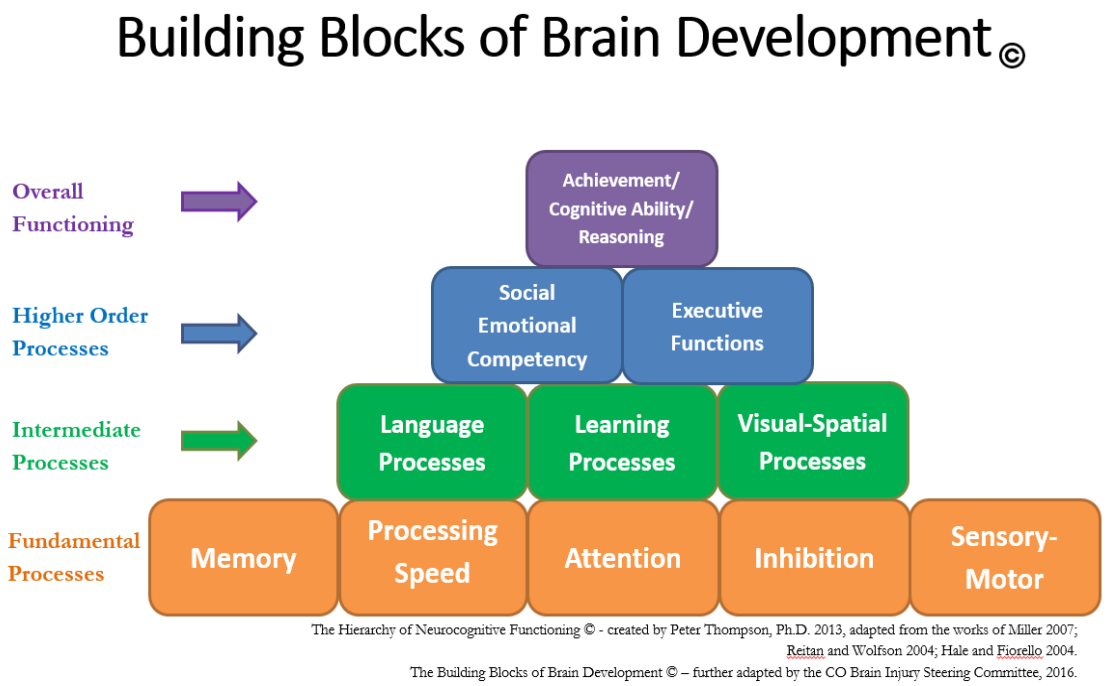
- Developmental history revealed Jack had a concussion in 2nd grade
- Parent and teacher reports Jack puts forth effort and he studies for a long time for tests
- Observations, parent and teacher interviews indicate that Jack cannot recall information
- Father had difficulties in school

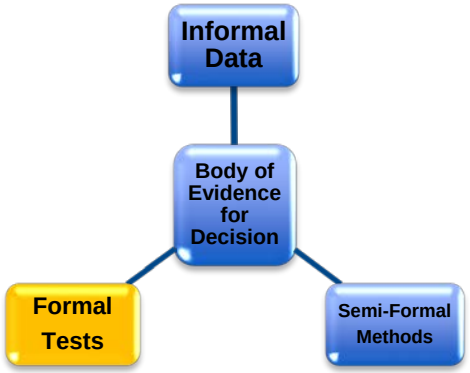


Thompson-Sousa Model

Next Step: Formal Measures

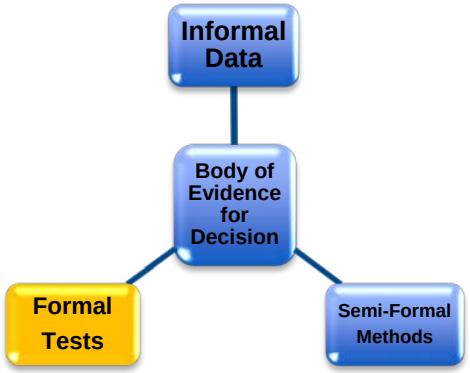
- Start formal testing: Initial focus on *Fundamental Level*





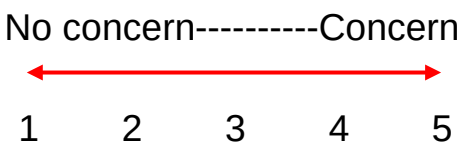
Formal Measures *Discoveries*

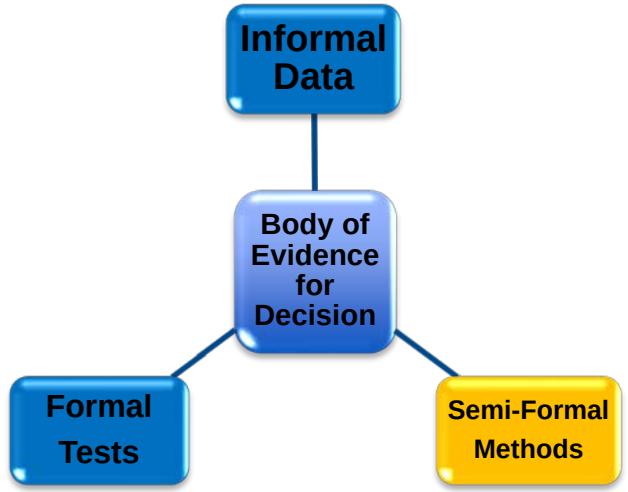
- Processing Speed- below average (SS-87)
- Working Memory- below Average (SS-83)
- Visual Memory- below Average (SS-75)
- Attention- low Average (SS-90)
- Language and Reasoning –Average (SS-91 and SS-92)



Next Step: Semi-Formal Methods

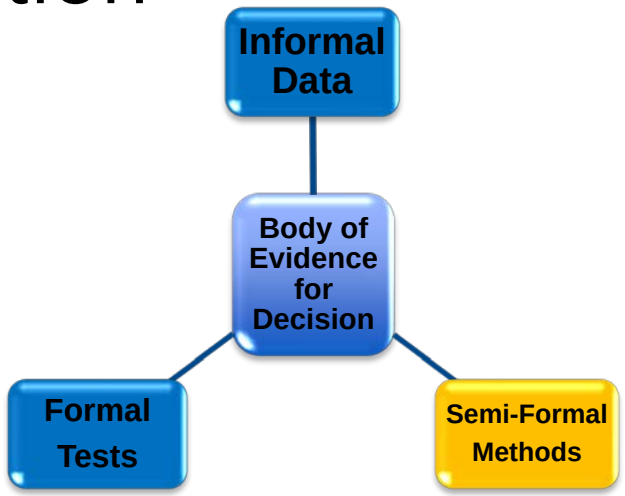
- NEF (CDE)
- *Memory Rating Scales (teachers and parents)*
- *Executive Function Rating Scales (several raters)*





Semi-Formal Methods Discoveries

- Majority of memory rating scales revealed problems
- Some, but not all, executive function rating scales revealed problems centering on “attention”

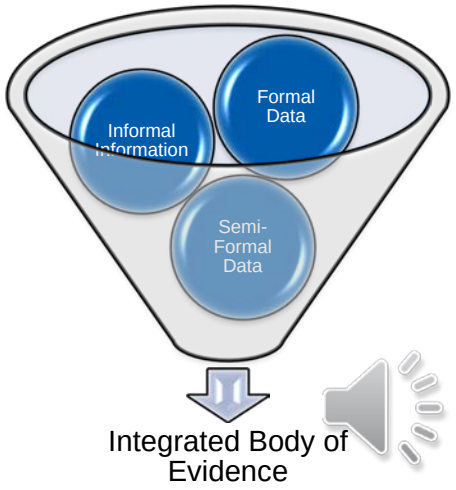


Final Step: Convergence of Data

- Integrate and examine all streams of information- "Convergence"
- Use all streams of data to tell the story of the student's struggle
- Be aware not all pieces will "fit" neatly, but look at the "body of evidence"
- Points to consider-evidence of data
  - Informal Methods-revealed father had memory issues in school
  - Formal Methods-very low memory scores, but low average attention scores
  - Semi-Formal Methods-multiple rating scales of memory were consistent

    but attention ratings were not consistent

- What is "Jack's Story?"



Evaluation Report: "*Golden Thread*"

- IEP evaluation summary tells Jack's story
- Integrates all streams of data
  - Achievement merges with BBBM data
  - Emphasize comprehensiveness (3-Factor Model)
- Account for congruent data to support decision
- Account for incongruent data-embrace the gray

Summary: The Top Building Block
Overall Functioning

- The top "capstone" block indicates the overall functioning of all the blocks below it. When lower-level blocks of the BBBM are not functioning well, the capstone block represents the "what" is wrong—such as low achievement.
- When the capstone block indicates low achievement or functioning, the fundamental blocks (bottom) of the BBBM typically provides the "why" or the cause of the problem. This is why we assess most of the "fundamental blocks" in special education evaluations.
- Using the BBBM as a guide, we must also integrate all data collected in an evaluation to ensure a comprehensive evaluation and to "tell the story" of the student's struggles.

End of Module 5.1
Executive Functioning

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