

LITERACY AND LEARNING DISABILITIES

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, defines a specific learning disability as, “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 do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia.”

Learning disability is a general term that describes specific kinds of learning problems. A learning disability can cause a person to have trouble learning and using certain skills. The skills most often affected are: reading, writing, listening, speaking, reasoning, and doing math.

SOURCE: National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities.

LD is not a single disorder. It is a term that refers to a group of disorders.

SOURCE: *Taking the Mystique Out of Learning Disabilities: Resource Guide*, Developed by Rochelle Kenyon, Ed.D., 21st Century Creative Consulting, Inc., May 2006.

Common learning disabilities include:

- Dyslexia- a language-based disability in which a person has trouble with specific language skills, particularly reading.
- Dyscalculia- a mathematical disability in which a person has a difficult time solving arithmetic problems and grasping math concepts.
- Dysgraphia- a writing disability in which a person finds it hard to form letters, write within a defined space and express ideas.
- **SOURCE:** 2004 & 2005 Learning Disabilities Association of America, www.ldanatl.org/aboutld/adults/special_pop/adult_ld.asp

Difficulty learning to read is the most prominent characteristic associated with LD. In reading instruction, the most commonly recognized type of LD is dyslexia. Dyslexia does not mean that the person sees words "backwards."

Learning disabilities (LD) vary from person to person. One person with LD may not have the same kind of problems as another person with LD. Researchers think that learning disabilities are caused by differences in how a person's brain works and how it processes information. Persons with LD are sometimes labeled “dumb” or “lazy.” In fact, they usually have average or above average intelligence. As many as one out of every five people in the United States has a learning disability. There is no “cure” for learning disabilities. They are lifelong.

SOURCE: National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities.

Learning disabilities affect girls as frequently as they do boys.

Learning disabilities may be inherited and often runs in families.

Because learning disabilities cannot be seen, they often go undetected. Recognizing a learning disability is even more difficult because the severity and characteristics vary. People can be diagnosed as having more than one area of learning disability.

Learning disabilities can occur 'co-morbidly' with other disorders (i.e., Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Manic Depression, Anxiety, and Information Processing Disorders), but are not the same.

SOURCE: *Taking the Mystique Out of Learning Disabilities: Resource Guide*, Developed by Rochelle Kenyon, Ed.D., 21st Century Creative Consulting, Inc., May 2006.

In 2003, 6 percent of adults reported they had been diagnosed or identified as having a learning disability. Adults who had a learning disability had lower average prose, document, and quantitative literacy than adults who did not have a learning disability. Among adults who had a learning disability, 24 percent had Below Basic prose and document literacy and 38 percent had Below Basic quantitative literacy. In comparison, among adults who did not have a learning disability, 13 percent had Below Basic prose literacy, 12 percent had Below Basic document literacy, and 20 percent had Below Basic quantitative literacy. There were also differences at the upper end of the scales: 7 percent of adults who had a learning disability had Proficient literacy on all three scales, compared with 13 to 14 percent of adults who did not have a learning disability.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, Literacy in Everyday Life: Results from the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy, April 2007.

Approximately one third of people with LD also have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD), which makes it difficult for them to concentrate, stay focused or manage their attention to specific tasks.

SOURCE: National Center for Learning Disabilities, www.nclld.org.

Persons with LD can be high achievers and can be taught ways to reduce obstacles and barriers caused by their disability. People can learn to compensate for specific deficits and even overcome through alternate ways of learning, accommodations and modifications.

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, people with learning disabilities of all ages are protected against discrimination and are entitled to accommodations in the classroom and workplace.

A variety of literacy and adult education programs sponsored by libraries, public schools, community colleges, private and nonprofit tutoring, and learning centers are available to help adults with LD develop skills in reading, writing and math.

SOURCE: Taking the Mystique Out of Learning Disabilities: Resource Guide, Developed by Rochelle Kenyon, Ed.D., 21st Century Creative Consulting, Inc., May 2006.

NATIONAL & FLORIDA STATISTICS

50% to 80% of all students in literacy and basic education programs have learning disabilities.

15% to 30% of all participants in job training programs have learning disabilities.

25% to 40% of all adults on welfare have learning disabilities.

2.9 million students received special education services for learning disabilities in the U.S. in 2001.

27% of children with learning disabilities drop out of high school.

51% of students receiving special education services through the public schools are identified as having learning disabilities.

SOURCE: 23rd Annual Report to Congress, 2001; National Institute for Literacy.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, learning disabilities affect approximately 5% of all children enrolled in public schools.

SOURCE: Taking the Mystique Out of Learning Disabilities: Resource Guide, Developed by Rochelle Kenyon, Ed.D., 21st Century Creative Consulting, Inc., May 2006.

Approximately 85% of all individuals with learning disabilities have difficulties in the area of reading.

SOURCE: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, <http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/pubs/readbro.htm>

Forty three percent of learning disabled are living at or below the poverty level. Forty-eight percent of those with learning disabilities are out of the workforce or unemployed.

SOURCE: Taking the Mystique Out of Learning Disabilities: Resource Guide, Developed by Rochelle Kenyon, Ed.D., 21st Century Creative Consulting, Inc., May 2006.

The 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) measures the English literacy of America's adults (people age 16 and older living in households or prisons). Forty-six percent of adults with Below Basic prose literacy had one or more disabilities, compared to 30 percent of adults in the NAAL population. The percentage of adults with multiple disabilities in the Below Basic prose level (21 percent) was significantly higher than the percentage of adults with multiple disabilities in the NAAL population (9 percent).

SOURCE: National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL): A First Look at the Literacy of America's Adults in the 21st Century (2006)

It is estimated that 15% of the U.S. population, or one in seven Americans, has some type of learning disability.

SOURCE: 2004 & 2005 Learning Disabilities Association of America, www.ldanatl.org/aboutld/adults/special_pop/adult_ld.asp

Sixty percent of adults with severe literacy problems have undetected or untreated learning disabilities.

SOURCE: National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center 1994

2002-03 graduation rates for the Specific Learning Disabled ESE Program Area was 62.3% with 7,737 graduates.

SOURCE: Change, and Response to Change in Florida's Public Schools, April 2005.

LEARNING DISABILITIES AND THE ESOL LEARNER

Little is known about how learning disabilities affect the adult learner of English as a second language.

Learners may show learning disabilities in a second language when they do not in their first. A learning disability may be so subtle in a first language that it is masked by an individual's compensatory strategies. These strategies may not be available to the learner in the new language (Ganschow & Sparks, 1993).

Technology has potential for assisting adult learners with learning disabilities to acquire a second language; computers have proven to be particularly useful (Gerber & Reiff, 1994; Riviere, 1996). In fact, adult ESL learners who have had limited success in learning English report that working one-on-one in the computer lab with a teacher seems more comfortable and productive than being one of many students in a crowded classroom (Almanza, Singleton, & Terrill, 1995/96). Using assistive technology can build self-esteem as well as provide immediate feedback, two things all adult language learners can benefit from.

Educators of learning disabled children and adults (Baca & Cervantes, 1991; Ganschow & Sparks, 1993; Lowry, 1990) give the following suggestions for providing instruction:

- Be highly structured and predictable.
- Include opportunities to use several senses and learning strategies.
- Provide constant structure and multisensory review.
- Recognize and build on learners' strengths and prior knowledge.
- Simplify language but not content; emphasize content words and make concepts accessible through the use of pictures, charts, maps, timelines, and diagrams.

Reinforce main ideas and concepts through rephrasing rather than through verbatim repetition.

SOURCE: Schwarz, Robin and Terrill, Lynda, ESL Instruction and Adults with Learning Disabilities, National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education, Washington, D.C., 2000.

READING PROGRAMS FOR LITERACY PROVIDERS

The following are some multisensory structured language programs offering effective teaching approaches for adults with learning disabilities:

- Alphabetic Phonics
- Barton Reading and Spelling system
- Fast ForWord
- The Herman Method
- Landmark Methodology
- Lindamood-Bell
- Multisensory Approach (MTA)
- Orton-Gillingham Method
- Project READ
- Slingerland Approach
- Starting Over
- Texas Scottish Rites
- Wilson Reading System

SOURCE: Learning Disabilities Association of America